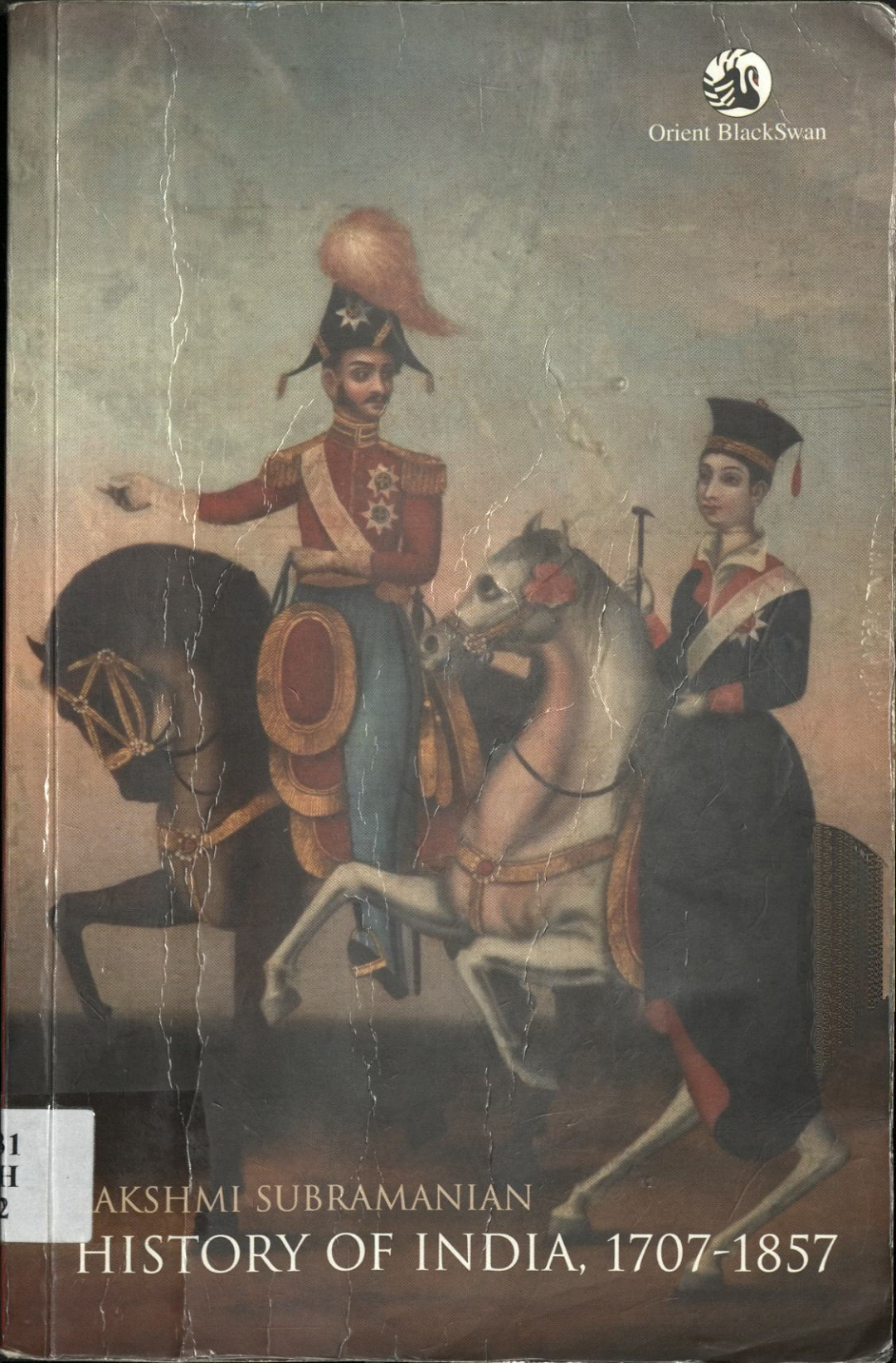

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AKSHMI SUBRAMANIAN

HISTORY OF INDIA, 1707-1857

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History of INDIA 1707–1857

Lakshmi Subramanian

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HISTORY OF INDIA 1707 – 1857

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for

my students

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Preface

This book is the product of several decades of teaching undergraduate and post graduate students. This combined with the fact that some of my research interests focused on the eighteenth century made the initial decision to write a text book covering the period 1707–1857 relatively simple. It was not before I actually began to write that I realised how difficult it was to combine fact, analysis and style to produce what I hoped would be an easy read for the undergraduate student. I hope that I have partially succeeded in doing this and also in stoking the interests of the more curious student by balancing interpretation with information.

I have in course of writing this book incurred several debts, above all to my students whose curiosity in some cases and whose apathy in others forced me to grapple with the difficulties of presentation. Living amidst students who prefer to resort to Wikipedia rather than read a text book cover to cover, I tried to make sense of what stood in their way of enjoying the subject, of their lack of enthusiasm about debates in history and indeed about the whole drama of change and continuity, of transformation and resistance. I am not sure I have succeeded but in making the effort, I have immensely enjoyed going back to the old classics as well as to the new ones to produce what I hope is a lucid enough narrative of a period that is as complex in its detail as it is simple in its broad sweep.

Most of my final writing was done while I was wrapping up my establishment in Delhi. I wish to record my appreciation of the staff in the libraries of the Sahitya Akademi and ICHR for making

available the books that I needed at this stage. I would also like to place on record my appreciation of Professor Sunita Zaidi who kept me company and gave me cups of tea as I typed away and to Dr Nirmal Kumar whose cheerful company never failed to enthuse me. Finally I would like to acknowledge my appreciation of all my students whose presence in the classroom has never failed to bring in that rush of adrenalin.

Lakshmi Subramanian

Kolkata
July 2010

Introduction

Introducing a textbook that spans the period between the passing away of the Mughal Empire and the creation of the Company Raj is deceptively easy and daunting at the same time. Easy because it could appear to endorse a basic thematic unity that attended the making of the Company rule and the implications this had for India as a territorial unit and as a diverse social entity. Difficult because several decades of research has produced conflicting and contradictory impressions on Company rule, the limits of its authority and how that attenuated its so called impact on Indian society and economy.

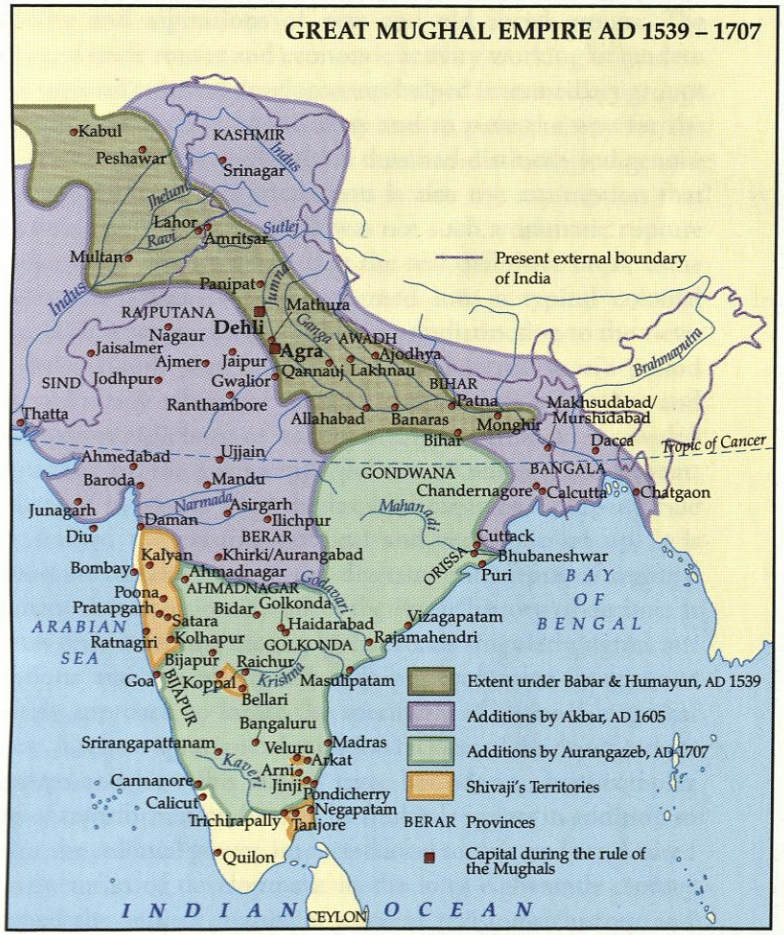
The period 1707–1857 has commanded a great deal of attention among historians. The period was dramatic to say the least—it was punctuated by grand events like the death of Aurangzeb, the Battle of Plassey and the Revolt of 1857—all of which had profound consequences on the historical development of the subcontinent. In many ways, it opened up a new phase of historical experience that historians, then and later, came to associate with the idea of the 'modern'. Consequently, the period figures very centrally in the debates we have on periodisation of Indian history; from as early as James Mill's *History of British India* (1818) to Jadunath Sarkar's classic account of the *Fall of the Mughal Empire* (1932–38), scholars have identified those features of early colonial rule as the markers of a new order, of a new orientation that eventually prepared Indians to embark on an anti-colonial struggle and lay the foundations of a modern nation-state. These features were one, the emergence of a new class of elite collaborators with an abiding commitment to

social reform and the rule of law and subsequently to representative institutions and two, the development of a new public sphere that was in turn the direct consequence of colonial initiatives in education, legislation and social reform. Thus for Sarkar, Plassey marked the beginning, the dawn of a new age, when India moved from the 'decadence of the medieval epoch to the modern era of regenerative social reform'. Here, he may well have been endorsing the sentiments of imperial apologists like Mill who preferred to see the British conquest as the ultimate saviour of India that had suffered the worst consequences of Muslim tyranny even though his sentiments were hardly shared by Muslim contemporaries who mourned the passing of the Mughal empire and referred to the emerging dislocation as the worst *inqilab* or revolution they had ever witnessed when the old moral order, with all its constituent elements, had been turned upside down beyond recognition. Nor were these sentiments only expressions of alienation and nostalgia—there was in the articulation of some writings especially by men like Mirza Itisamuddin (who travelled to France and England in 1765 and authored the *Shigharfnama-e-bilayat*) or Mirza Abu Taleb Londoni (who travelled to England during 1799–1803), the sense that something about the English regime was not merely different but emancipatory; many of them expressed their appreciation of how the English interrogated assumptions about hierarchy and status and assigned an altogether new importance to education. This is not to suggest that Company rule was uniformly received by all sections of the population or that Company rule on its part did not accommodate elements of the existing set up. The complexity of the process of both conquest and its consequences is what forms the subject matter of this textbook. In fact, what it attempts to do is to identify the specificities of the processes of social and political change over a century and a half, and also to try and understand the complex ways in which its history has been written over the last few decades. History and historiography of the transition from Mughal to British rule is at the base of the survey.

There have been in recent years a number of textbooks on the history of India between the eighteenth and the twentieth centuries. Many of these with the possible exception of Shekhar

Bandyopadhaya's work have been intended for undergraduate students in Anglo-American universities and have tended therefore, to be condensed surveys with an overarching general formulation that emphasises either the tension between the centre and the periphery expressed as in the case of Burton Stein (*A History of India*) in the dialectic between state and community or the crystallisation of regional identities amidst the central one and the larger Indian politics especially after 1857. This textbook does not insist on being exceptional or different but it does try and look more closely at the period of British rule and prefaces it with a more detailed history of Mughal decline and with the assertion of regionalism as a dominant force in the early eighteenth century, its potentialities and its importance in studying the notions of change and continuity more empirically. In the process, it attempts to grapple with the idea of the early modern as a conceptual category. The Mughal Empire as a centralised entity indisputably went beyond regional conflicts and fostered a certain mode of elite culture and was instrumental in melding a composite ruling class that saw itself as a larger ruling group going beyond narrow ethnic and regional ties. The ruling class was an important agent of centralisation until it developed political ambitions in the course of the eighteenth century, when regional state systems emerged some under their aegis, others outside it, but all of them generating important economic and political changes. The variety of regional polities emerging in the eighteenth century testified to the dynamism of political and economic change in India that spilled over into the half century of Mughal decline and set the stage for a new political orientation and temperament that historians have begun to identify as being early modern. What underpinned most of the new regional states was a close relationship between merchants and rulers—between state and commerce that produced among other things, an extended cash nexus, commercialisation and social mobility and by extension a new sense of power management and governance. The change in the social balance from the dominance of the mounted knight to that of the financier and trader (the bania or *baqqal*) epitomised the enhanced significance of mercantilism as an idea that began to find increasing favour with sovereigns in eighteenth century India.

The pre-eminence of the merchant in the emerging economy of the eighteenth century has been the basis of much of the historiography of the eighteenth century that goes under the name of being revisionist and one that tends to downplay the so called centralised dimensions of the Mughal set up and to question the rupture that the colonial conquest brought about in the Indian economy. The decay of the Mughal empire and the agrarian system that had supported it, according to historians like Andre Wink and C. A. Bayly, was the result of long-term social processes that ate into the Mughal structure and enabled its power holders to assert their autonomy. These power holders were generally rural and revenue intermediaries and also those commercial groups who had entered revenue farming and began to invest in land. The Mughal State was not always able to control them and bring them under its centralised control, and as Chetan Singh has demonstrated in his work on the Punjab, the state in the peripheral regions contracted very informally with local communities. The growing strength of intermediaries is evident from Muzaffar Alam's work (*The Crisis of Empire in Mughal North India: Awadh and the Punjab 1707–1748*) which makes an effective case for peasant rebellions led by zamindars in areas of relative prosperity and seriously challenged the view that high revenue always led to exploitation. The gradual maturation of the intermediaries was what formed the basis for the regional state system in the eighteenth century as they had most benefited from the Mughal Empire. The study of intermediary groups ranging from revenue intermediaries and power holders like the Maratha deshmukhs or the Banaras rajas to merchants and revenue contractors by historians like C. A. Bayly and Andre Wink have stood in marked contrast to the agrarian orientation of the historians of the Aligarh school and have brought back attention to the non-agrarian sector of the economy. The second aspect of the revisionist historiography has been to look at the advent of the English East India Company rule as part of the same overall process of regional decentralisation and more importantly to re-assess its divisive impact on the Indian economy. For the revisionists, it is not as though colonial rule was without consequence; the question was to figure out when the consequences became perceptible and whether these were irreversible. In other words, much of the debate



has been to do with the timing of the colonial impact, not with denying it altogether. For C. A. Bayly, the decline of the eighteenth century was too much of an overstatement, especially in view of the vitality and development of many areas in the country and the mobility and aspirations of new and old social groups. The regrouping of trade routes and economic activity working in tandem with new regional political developments helped intermediary groups to emerge as new movers and shakers and to pave the way for the foundations of Company rule, which thus had distinctly indigenous origins. Implicit in such a contention is also the assumption that Company rule as it began in 1757 was not such a dramatic rupture as had once been projected and that the real definitive break came much later when India was transformed into a typical colonial economy. Such a position is in marked contradistinction to the views held by Irfan Habib who saw the eighteenth century as a period of chaos and decay when the Mughal Empire lost its vitality and the inherent contradictions of its supporting structure were revealed and aggravated by the Company's politics of self-aggrandisement. While there is no doubt that the establishment of Company rule severely strained the existing political and economic set up, it is also important to take note of the diversity and depth of regional development that occasionally offset the linear history of decline. It is here that revisionist historiography has made singularly significant contributions and has attempted a deeper and more imaginative micro-study approach to locate the specificity of regional historical experience. Just how agrarian colonisation facilitated the rise of certain social groups and how this altered caste boundaries, how complex networks of transformation headed by multiple agents in addition to the state or the colonial power, impacted local society and accelerated certain trajectories of development in the long eighteenth century have formed the subject matter of a lot of revisionist history and have undoubtedly deepened our understanding of historical change in early modern India. The trajectory of the eighteenth century regional states was in part interrupted by the intrusion of the English East India Company but whether this alone was instrumental in thwarting the transition to capitalism in India remains a matter of conjecture. What is less debatable is the fact that early modern India

did not have the institutions of civil society and while the advances in banking and trade were impressive, technology remained at a lower level of development. The cheapness of Indian labour was at once a help and a hindrance.

The making of Company rule in India is the second broad theme around which the textbook has been organised. The ways in which the English East India Company infiltrated into the regional state systems, expanded its commercial agenda and then became a ruler taking recourse to traditional forms of legitimacy are addressed in some detail. The empire was not won in a fit of absent mindedness—the Company cast itself like a regional power and it was from the 1790s that it became strong enough to think of dominating political events. This produced a new imperial temper coinciding with the arrival of Lord Wellesley and then with the advent of more vigorous social reform. The consequences of Company intervention in social and political affairs were exacerbated by a growing distance between the rulers and their subjects, the full extent of which was revealed in the violence that accompanied the great revolt of 1857. In fact by the end of the period under review, the very nature of the Raj had changed as had the disposition of the Company's men. The age of partnership had run its course, leaving the stage open for a progressive racialisation of British colonialism. As Durba Ghosh remarks in her work on *Sex and the Family in Colonial India: The Making of Empire*, the expansion of the Company's frontiers corresponded with growing anxieties about social frontiers and the ways in which inter-racial relationships had to be managed.

An important sub-theme in the history of the Company Raj is the ways in which colonial knowledge was produced and how these directly shaped the self-perception of its subjects. This is an area where some of the most exciting research has taken place in the last twenty years. The setting up of institutions such as the colleges of Fort William and Fort George was responsible for allowing a kind of scholarship to emanate from the intellectual projects of the early colonial state, and that went far in informing Indian ideas about their history and tradition. At the same time, the colonial institutions created new figures like the Tamil *munshi*, the Brahmin pandit collaborator, who successfully bridged two worlds and

interacted with the complex world of documentation that the Raj represented. The indigenous collaborators became key figures in the modernising project that the colonial state undertook. Essentially, the project involved the application of Enlightenment ideals, the Rule of Law, of an impartial bureaucracy and empirical knowledge, new taxonomies of standardisation and above all the articulation of a moral responsibility for the benefit of the subjects. Not that the rhetoric was able to remove all the inherent ambiguities of a colonial situation—the gaps in communication, the growing distance between ruler and ruled surfaced whenever a flashpoint was reached, as it did in 1857.

The emergence of indigenous elites was an integral part of the history of colonial cities in the period under review. The rise of Calcutta, Bombay and Madras in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries marked an important development in the history of urbanisation. These were distinctive formations in that they represented an interesting mix of European and indigenous influences. Even as these cities assumed new urban architectural features, they continued to accommodate more traditional structures both in terms of spatial design as well as in terms of practices. The coexistence of the 'white' and 'black' towns in these cities testified to this tendency. However, in the long run, the cities contributed very decisively to the creation of a new 'publics', a new notion of public space created by institutions like the municipality and the judiciary. We have Kanakalatha Mukund's recent work on South India that looks at early Madras as a site of initial interaction where the Company had to deal with resistance from sections of the city's population and where differences were built into the way the city spaces were organised. She also endorses the view that judicial regulation introduced by the English East India Company resolved disputes and gave local inhabitants an effective channel for developing a new language of entitlements and expectation. The Bombay merchants too made full use of the new municipal facilities and contributed to the development of the city as a multi-ethnic cosmopolitan city, accommodating a diverse merchant population. The business elite in Bombay also invested substantially in urban estate—Amar Farooqi, who emphasises the colonial orientation of Bombay and sees it as a

built-in factor of asymmetrical development, argues that property rights were systematically strengthened. What is important for us to keep in mind is the ways in which these colonial cities became gateways for a new social dispensation that Indian elites were quick to identify with and use as a base for their subsequent political transactions.

In contrast to the colonial cities was the countryside, where the peasant faced the pressures of an escalating revenue demand and the exactions of the moneylender. Without exaggerating the vice-like grip of the moneylender, in cahoots with the newly designated revenue collector, it seems legitimate to argue that the colonial system exposed the underbelly of agrarian India to the vicissitudes of the global economy. Even if, as researches have demonstrated, some sections of rural society benefited under the new regime, there is hardly any doubt that the changes associated with colonial power undermined the moral economy of the peasant as he grappled with a world that was not entirely familiar. The survey tracks some of these moments of rebellion to make a case for the politics of the peasants and the subaltern classes as much as it does to analyse the transactions and anxieties of the collaborating elites.

References & Select Readings

This list covers most of the references alluded to in the chapter and also includes a range of more recent research monographs. This is intended to satisfy the curious student who may wish to read beyond the prescribed reading list.

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Chapter 1

The Eighteenth Century Transition

The eighteenth century (1700–1800) occupies an interesting position in the history of India. In recent years, it has also emerged as a major site of debate and deliberations among historians. The reasons for this are many. As a century that witnessed the passing away of an empire and its replacement by another, it was viewed and described in very different ways by contemporary observers, commentators and participants. For chroniclers of the declining Mughal Empire, the century represented a period of political and cultural loss—of profound transformation that was likened to a revolution, an inqilab that could only be expressed in poems of lament or *shahr e ashob*. For newcomers who were busy building smaller regional states and political units, the century was one of opportunities that permitted a redistribution of resources and produced contrasting and competing narratives of kingship, governance and conflict. For the aspiring English East India Company that looked at every opportunity for expansion and self-aggrandisement, the century had to be projected as one of instability and decay, giving them the necessary moral justification for conquest and subjugation. These multiple narratives have made retrospective history-writing complex and have also provided valuable insights into the complexities of the social, political and cultural landscape of eighteenth-century India.

We begin our story with the decline of the Mughal Empire in the eighteenth century, a theme that is familiar to virtually every school child in India. In any case the rise and fall of empires has been

the staple of all history. Even in a contemporary sense, the crisis of authority and governance is central to our lives and constitutes much of our current debates and reflections. From the point of view of the Mughal state, the eighteenth century was a period of crisis finding concrete expression in the erosion of administrative institutions, the increasing weakness of the army and the withdrawal of consent by its subject population and client groups. On the flip side, the century was for the same set of reasons seen as a period of opportunity by several groups and individuals who were able to exploit conditions of political fluidity to carve out independent regimes of power.

One of the largest centralised states known in pre-modern world history, the Mughal Empire by the end of the seventeenth century held supreme political authority over a population numbering between 100 and 150 million and territories covering most of the subcontinent. It remained a strong and centralised organisation for almost two centuries even as its economic apparatus occasionally showed signs of pressure and strain. By the first quarter of the eighteenth century however, and within a very short spell from 1707 to 1739, the Empire underwent a radical transformation or more accurately, contraction as its rulers watched over a rapidly fragmenting set up.

Until the 1970s, the theme of decline dominated the historiography of the eighteenth century. Some of the most productive debates in Indian history revolved around the issues of Mughal decline and the nature of the Mughal state. Subsequently historiographical attention has tended to focus on the regions that emerged as power centres and how these reflected important processes of redistribution and economic growth in the period and how these in turn gestured to a new conception of power and management that resembled the profiles of early modern states in Europe and Asia.

Theories of Mughal Decline

The decline of Mughal power was dramatically manifested in the bitter and wracking wars of succession that eroded its centralised structure and strained its military resources. Added to this was a

Maratha

Between 1400 and 1600 the term referred to warrior chiefs who served the Bahmani Sultanate. They were a community that arose from among the peasants but gradually became distinct from them thanks to their martial tradition.

series of devastating invasions from the northwest that exposed the Empire to ruinous conditions of insecurity that encouraged secessionist tendencies and allowed provincial officials to establish separate and independent spheres of control. The declaration of independence by the governors of Bengal, Awadh and Hyderabad, the organisation of a confederate power structure by the Marathas, the emergence of smaller independent states in the Deccan and the peninsula (Mysore, Arcot, Travancore to name a few), the formation of Afghan principalities in Farukhabad and Rohilkhand, not to speak of the aspirations of the Sikh rebels meant that by the middle of the eighteenth century, the Mughal Empire was but a shadowy one.

What produced this fragmentation? What ate into the reserves of the imperial structure that was no longer able to defend itself against contenders to say nothing of its inability to realise further expansion? Historians have been divided on this question and the differences of emphasis have tended to cast a long shadow on the very nature of the eighteenth century. Do we take the century to be one of decline? We certainly will if we are to use the health of the Empire as an index of growth and security. We will not, if we take as our benchmark regionalism as a potent and positive force, with prospects and potentialities. For the moment, however, we need to try and identify the reasons that hurtled the empire into a quagmire of crises.

Several earlier explanations of the Mughal Empire's decline stressed the personality factor; the weakness of the later Mughals and the alleged communal policies of Aurangzeb (1658–1707) whose campaigns against the Rajputs and Marathas was seen to have provoked resentment and resistance among the Hindus subjects of the Mughal Empire. There was also an institutional failure especially the decay of the army, whose integrity and strength was undermined by factionalism, succession disputes and obsolete technology. Subsequent historians analysed the decline more in terms of structural constraints and contradictions that limited the functioning of the administration and economy. Irfan

Later Mughals	
Bahadur Shah	1707–1712
Jahandar Shah	1712–13
Farrukhsiyar	1713–18
Muhammad Shah	1719–48
Ahmad Shah	1748–54
Alamgir II	1754–59
Shah Alam	1759–1806
Akbar II	1806–37
Bahadur Shah II	1837–57

Habib in his classic work, *The Agrarian System of Mughal India*, drew attention to the exploitative nature of agrarian taxation under the Mughals, to the three-way contradictions of exploitation and contestation between and among the ruling class (*jagirdars*), hereditary landholding classes (*zamindars*) and the cultivators (*khud khast* and *pahi khast*) and which in the long run produced an endemic crisis and exhausted the ability of the system to either augment productivity or extract revenues from its producers. The failure of the agrarian system coincided with factional tensions and dissensions among the nobility with disastrous results. Satish Chandra in his classic work on parties and politics at the Mughal court in the eighteenth century argued how after 1707, a divided nobility failed to keep the system in working condition and put their narrow self-interest before everything else. To make full sense of these arguments, it is necessary to understand the actual apparatus of Mughal power and how it was organised.

Jagirdar

Jagirdars were holders of jagirs or land assignments in lieu of military service. These assignments were made by the ruling emperor to members of the ruling class and officials. These assignments were not hereditary and were supposed to revert to the ruler on the death of the original grantee.

Zamindar

A zamindar was a holder of revenue rights. This was a hereditary right to the collection and enjoyment of land revenue. All categories of zamindars under the Mughals were required to perform certain police, judicial and military duties.

The Mughal Empire described at times as a war state and at others as patrimonial bureaucracy basically rested on a system of co-sharers of power with the emperor at the top. The aristocracy was constituted of

Mansabdar

Mansabdars were differentiated by the zat and the sawar rank. The zat referred to the number of troops maintained by the mansabdar and the sawar referred to the number of horses maintained by him.

military men from Central Asia and Persia as well as from within India and was organised around the system of military service and recompense for the same by land grants or *jagirs*. Every aristocrat was called a *mansabdar*, with a dual numerical rank—*zat* and *sawar* signifying personal rank and the number of troops he was expected to maintain respectively. Most of the mansabdars were paid in the form of jagirs or land grants whose revenue was expected to cover his personal emolument as well as the maintenance allowance of his soldiers and troops. The mansabdars could be and were transferred at will by the emperor and ties of loyalty were strictly personal.

What united the nobility was the sense of a personal loyalty to the emperor. This was tenuous under the best circumstances, but by the early eighteenth century it was virtually non-existent as factionalism became rampant in the imperial court. The nobility had distinct segments—there was the Turani faction that came from Central Asia, the Irani group from Persia and the Indian Muslims and Hindus. A degree of competition was always present within the nobility but in the eighteenth century it was aggravated by a pervasive economic crisis, referred to by historian Satish Chandra as the jagirdari crisis. Simply put, it referred to a mismatch between the availability of jagirs and the growing numbers of jagirdars. Added to this was a fall in the actual amount of revenue realised especially in the south and the adverse consequences of a price rise that strained the resources of the nobles. While admittedly the issue of matching actual revenue collection with the estimated revenue income of a jagir was not new, the eighteenth century crisis was especially acute as the Deccan wars saw a proliferation in the number of nobles and a real managerial crisis stemming from Aurangzeb's decision to attach new lands to the Crown as *khalsa* lands.

Whether managerial or substantive, there is no doubt that the perception of a crisis fanned tensions and antagonism among the nobility especially after the death of Aurangzeb and under the regimes of Jahandar Shah (1712–13) and Farrukhsiyar (1713–19) and even Muhammad Shah (1719–48). These found expression

in politicking at the imperial court, a struggle for the *wizarat*, and more significantly in falling military standards. As crown lands were exhausted and greedy maneuverings paralysed government functions, the economy, whose limits had already been reached, showed signs of collapse. Revenue collections fell as peasant and zamindari revolts thwarted the efforts of the administration to maintain authority.

Wizarat

Office of the prime minister and under the Mughals, in charge of the important task of assigning jagirs to Mughal nobles.

Recurring peasant revolts were an important cause of instability and weakened the structure of the empire. Many of these reflected the aspirations of the zamindars, the second most important co-sharers of agrarian power in Mughal India. If the Mughal state had empowered the nobility by granting them jagirs it had also placated the existing indigenous aristocracy by allowing them to retain their rights to land revenue collection. The term zamindars, loosely translated to local landlords, actually referred to those groups in rural society who enjoyed the right to a share of the produce. Nurul Hasan in an important essay on the zamindars (*Thoughts on Agrarian Relations in Mughal India*, 1973) suggested that the word 'zamindar' gained currency in the days of Mughal rule and that it denoted various holders of hereditary interests, ranging from powerful, independent and autonomous chieftains to petty intermediaries at the village level. He classified them under three categories, namely autonomous chieftains, intermediary zamindars and primary zamindars. Autonomous chieftains enjoyed virtually sovereign powers and continued to enjoy this even under Mughal overlordship with certain modifications. They were persuaded to join the imperial service and over time became dependent for their position on the goodwill of the emperor. Intermediary zamindars collected revenue from primary zamindars and paid it either to the imperial treasury or to the jagirdars and formed not only the backbone of the administration but were also responsible for law and order. The primary zamindars were holders of proprietary rights over agricultural as well as habitational lands and included peasant proprietors who carried on cultivation themselves or with hired labour. What characterised the zamindars was their strong orientation to the locality and a deep familiarity with its agrarian structure and which

enabled them to assume leadership of a sort against state power. Not surprisingly therefore, with the increasing impotence of central Mughal authority and with the growing rapacity of the Mughal jagirdars for more revenue, there was a widespread tendency among zamindars to stage rebellions, and to withhold revenue payments and resist the state when it attempted to forcibly collect revenue. For the peasants, the zamindars were the natural leaders with the result that a spate of agrarian uprisings led to a severe straining of the older social arrangements that had underpinned the Mughal set up. A manual written in 1714 was explicit. It pointed out that mansabdars who held jagirs put extreme pressure on the peasants and when the latter were driven to desperation, they absconded from the *raiyati* country to settle in the lands of the rebellious zamindars. 'The country of the rebellious zamindars thus becomes well populated and the rebels gain in power every day' (quoted in Irfan Habib, p. 336).

The agrarian uprisings had obvious consequences. These weakened the basis of the Mughal state and helped in the mobilisation of local groups. The revolts were especially serious in northern India (Moradabad, Baiswara in Awadh). Sikhs and Jats rebelled in the Punjab where the foundations of Mughal authority were seriously shaken. For revisionist historians of the eighteenth century, however, these revolts spelt a dramatic shift in the configurations of social power and the accumulation of surplus resources in regions like Moradabad-Bareilly, Awadh and Benaras contributed to the consolidation of landlord or magnate power and which asserted itself in the course of the eighteenth century. So to look at agrarian disorder as a symptom of decline would not capture the complexities of social transformation that had occurred over a period of half a century, one that paved the way for regionalism and a new regional power structure at the expense of the centralised structure. As Muzaffar Alam has argued in the context of Awadh, it was in the wake of general agricultural prosperity that zamindars found 'themselves strong enough to rise against the Mughals, asking for greater share in political power and produce in the area under their control'.

Seen from this vantage point, the decline of the Mughal state was not tantamount to absolute decline of the economy—it involved a redistribution of resources among groups that had grown

and consolidated their assets and subsequently felt ready to assert political power. Thus, there were areas of surplus that coexisted with areas of stagnation and decline—Bengal and eastern Uttar Pradesh for example. Rising agricultural production and monetisation in some areas of the economy made available more resources at the disposal of the zamindars and peasants and powerful lineages who gained advantages at the expense of a declining centre.

The tendencies and potential for growth do not, however, cancel the reality of disruption especially in the context of trade in late Mughal India. The manifestation of commercial stasis and the effects this had on merchants and bankers also forms the basis for the 'Great Firm' theory of the decline of the Mughal Empire put forward by Karen Leonard (1979). In her view, the loss of confidence in Mughal authority forced bankers to migrate to provincial courts and centres. In the heyday of the Mughal empire, bankers financed tax farmers, remitted land revenues and extended cash credits to rulers in times of need. In the mid-seventeenth century this changed as bankers lost confidence especially in the aftermath of Maratha raids and shifted their loyalties to provincial and regional rulers, the chief beneficiary being the English East India Company. The argument is not entirely convincing and as J. F. Richards pointed out in a rejoinder, banking families did not constitute the financial backbone of the Mughal system and their withdrawal into the provinces was a later development in any case. However, what is important for us to note is the impact the crisis of empire had on the trading economy of India and how this fed into the changing political economy of late Mughal India.

The centrality of India in the trading structure of the Indian Ocean was based largely on its advanced textile production and manufacture that supported an extensive network of trade relations. Between the fifteenth and mid-seventeenth centuries, Indian overseas trade registered a phenomenal expansion with spices, textiles, indigo, grain and sugar among other things circulating in markets all over west and south east Asia. This phenomenal expansion, according to Ashin Dasgupta, was largely on account of political security and the resultant expansion of markets provided by the Mughal, Ottoman and Safavid empires

respectively. Merchants were able to draw from an expanding hinterland in the Indian subcontinent a wide array of staple exports that found growing demand in the markets of the Indian Ocean. In return India absorbed huge and expanding quantities of bullion or silver that fed the imperial Mughal mint and whose output entered the revenue and commercial transaction of the empire. The trading system in terms of scale and the credit structure it depended on was sophisticated. Shipping was by and large in the hands of Muslim merchants—domiciled, local and foreign while the business of brokerage and banking was in the hands of local Hindu commercial castes. There were marked regional variations but notwithstanding this the dichotomy between an Islamised sea and a Hindu shore seems to have prevailed. The advent of the European East India companies did not alter the broad outlines of the trading structure; foreign merchants fitted into it. Where their presence did signal a change was in the domain of maritime protection and the responsibility they assumed for convoying overseas trade in the Indian Ocean. This was significant as it gave the European companies a space from which they could aspire to greater control and autonomy.

The implications of Mughal decline for overseas and internal trade were largely in terms of declining security and infrastructure arrangements, of falling demand for Indian exports in the markets of West Asia and of the steady and expanding competition of European private traders whose operations ate into the ventures of Indian businessmen. The latter over time became the nucleus of a sustained European offensive against the Mughal authority—a phenomenon that, in the context of Bengal, is referred to as 'sub imperialism'. The consequences of these developments were serious. The premier port cities of Mughal India, namely Surat and Hooghly as well as other centres in south eastern India sustained a sharp fall in their trade and shipping and were superseded by the colonial cities of Calcutta, Bombay and Madras. Muslim shipowners were serious casualties and found their space taken over by private European traders whose operations registered a phenomenal expansion in the western Indian Ocean. Holden Furber's estimates for the western Indian Ocean segment and Peter Marshall's study,

East Indian Fortunes in Bengal, reveal very clearly the rise of the English fleet and the successful competition of English private merchants, many of whom were in a position to deploy their official position to private advantage. The absolute drop in Surat's trade figures (16 million to 6 million between 1700 and 1750), the elimination of Muslim shipowning families by English private traders, the rise of the Calcutta fleet and the success of the English merchants who took over for all practical purposes the freight and carrying trade of the Indian Ocean, the disruption in the arterial trade routes of western and northern India and in the highway between Surat and Bengal signaled a major collapse of India's trading economy. The fallout for bullion supplies and for a disruption in the money market was evident with all parties having to contract their operations and to work under conditions of reduced profit. Debasement of coinage, escalation of interest rates and instances of bankruptcy among Surat merchants were recurrent features and reinforced the impression of a difficult if not outrightly grim situation. One way out for merchants and bankers especially was to opt for new political patrons whose support could help deflect the exacting claims of a decaying Mughal administration. The result was a steady gravitation of merchants towards a new dispensation, including the European trading companies whose settlements seemed to offer a safe asylum. The realignment of bankers and merchants with local and regional political entities coincided in the second phase, namely the half century following the invasion of Nadir Shah in 1739–40 with the articulation of regional power in the subcontinent.

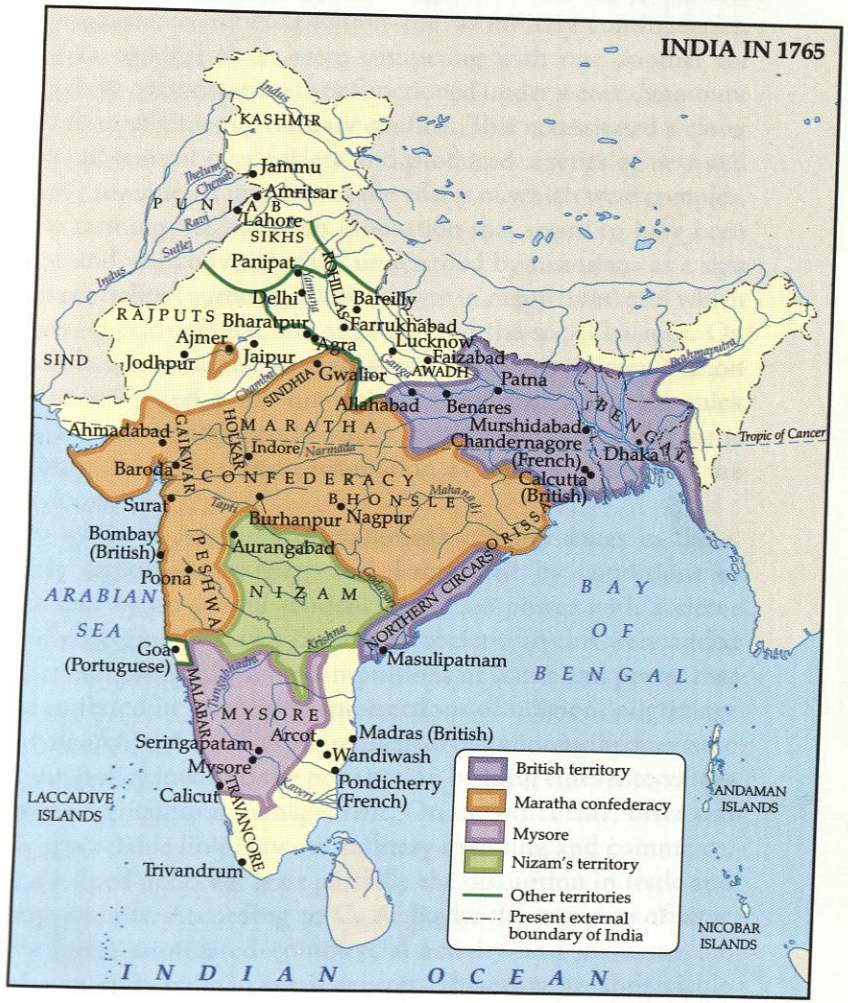
The reality of Mughal decline came into dramatic relief during the invasions of Nadir Shah in 1739. Until this date, the process of decay had manifested as a sordid tale of politicking and intrigue in the imperial court, of repression and resistance, of revenue defaulters and frustrated officials, of commercial disturbance and breakdown of law and governance. Jat insurgency, Rajput rebellions and the Maratha pressure aggravated the crisis at court whose utter incompetence was demonstrated in 1739 when the Persian ruler Nadir Shah attacked Delhi and humiliated the emperor and his nobles. Of Afghan extraction, Nadir Shah (1736–47) had

supplanted the Safavid dynasty in Iran, definitively ousted the Mughals from Afghanistan and reduced the Punjab to submission. He routed a Mughal army that had been hastily cobbled together at Karnal, forced the emperor into submission and wreaked terrible vengeance on the people of Delhi when a section of them rose against the Persian army. For nine hours, the Persians massacred thousands of people, pillaged the city and went home with fabulous treasure, leaving Delhi in ruins. This marked a date of no return as it encouraged the formalisation of the tendency of secession and the regional powers to declare once and for all their autonomous status.

Given the rapidity of political change and institutional collapse and the brutality of resistance and invasion that accompanied the formal collapse of the Mughal Empire, it is not surprising that its contemporaries viewed it as a moment of cataclysmic decline. Revisionist historians whose work we shall have occasion to mention presently saw the developments differently but it is important to remember that their focus was on certain regions like Bengal and Awadh that saw perceptible advances in agricultural productivity and where new and dynamic regional formations were emerging. None of them however discount the nature of the Mughal institutional crisis or the dislocations in the commercial and revenue economies making it actually difficult to arrive at a middle ground that is meaningful. What seems useful about revisionist historiography is the note of caution in looking at the Mughal state as a monolithic entity and overemphasising its cohesiveness and to use 'decline' as a descriptive category in understanding the eighteenth century when a lot more than mere decline happened. To appreciate the dynamism and vitality of social change in eighteenth century India, we need to look at the emergence of regional powers and their structure.

Emergence of the Regional States

The emergence of regional states marked a major turning point in the political landscape of eighteenth century India. The emerging



states were diverse in terms of their orientation as well as of their power base. What united them was a broad conception of power sharing with new social groups and a political economy that was geared to greater commercialisation and to military contingencies. Given that regional states were competing with one another for resources, the circumstances they functioned under were tantamount to a situation of endemic military conflict. This necessitated a closer and vertical control over society and produced a series of new and innovative revenue arrangements, the effects of which were complex. Revenue farming was one such innovation that seems to have been rampant and was conventionally understood by historians as a sign of weak centralised authority (which it was in many cases) and which undermined existing relations of power and the social balance. On the other hand revisionist historians tend to see this as an expression of monetisation and as an innovative strategy that generated quick returns for the ruling power which could then invest the same in military technology and organisation as well as in keeping the soldiery content.

The political economy of eighteenth century states in India, one may legitimately argue, was determined by conditions of warfare and by an overall tendency to share power with a closer circle of elite groups drawn from local society. To this were added the more complex and subtle compulsions of status and power that were manifested in interesting intersections of religion, pilgrimage and urban architecture. The consequences of an intensified revenue extraction policy involved the penetration by local elites into village society and agricultural management. On the other side, there was also an appreciable link between military spending and commerce, and that helped deflect at least partially the disruption in trade and exchange circuits. According to C. A. Bayly, the presence of large military forces stimulated commercial activity and increased the flow of coin and credit in small centres. There was an appreciable increase in urban development where minting activities were in evidence especially under the aegis of smaller and new regional states.

The working of this political economy was on full display in virtually all the states that emerged in the wake of the declining

Mughal Empire. These states were of different categories and derived from different conditions of political and economic processes but all of them embodied significant elements of dynamism and social transformation. The foremost among the new states were the 'successor states' (Bengal, Awadh and Hyderabad) so called because they were part of the older Mughal set up. Founded by erstwhile Mughal governors, they gradually severed their links with the centre and set themselves up as independent monarchs. In all three cases, as we shall see, the ruling class entered into very close alliances with local power holders (zamindars, merchant bankers and administrators) to develop a strongly integrated administration and extract the revenue surplus effectively. In the successor states, Hindu scribal groups like Kayasths emerged as the mainstay of administration and contributed to its professionalisation and to the articulation of a composite Indo-Islamic literate culture.

Thus, as we shall observe, the emergence of regional states of varying denominations and size in the first half of the eighteenth century was in part an inevitable consequence of the political weakness of the imperial Mughal set up and in part a manifestation of older tendencies of agrarian consolidation that had matured and accumulated within the Mughal system. The political trajectory of the eighteenth century states and social formations, almost without exception, changed substantially sometime in the middle of the century, thanks to the success of the new power, namely the English East India Company that subverted the older regional state system to emerge paramount. The eighteenth century thus presents itself to us in two very convenient phases even if the politics that distinguished these stages was exceedingly messy and complex. What one could legitimately observe is that in the first half of the century, the emerging political and social aspirants struck at the very root of the Mughal system to emerge as competitors while in the second half even as some of them settled down to the more staid business of consolidation and administration, the rapacious politics of the new power the English East India Company eroded the fragile bases of the new states, rendering them incapable of maintaining their sovereignty or power. Seen from this vantage point, we may reflect on the limits and limitations of eighteenth century regionalism as a political force.

Bengal (1707–57)

Let us take the case of Bengal where in course of the first half of the eighteenth century a vibrant regional polity emerged under Murshid Quli Khan (1713–27) and his successors. Sent as *subahdar* (provincial governor) to Bengal by Emperor Aurangzeb and armed with instructions to augment the region's revenue collection meant for the imperial treasury, Murshid Quli ended up rehauling the entire administrative set up that not only stepped up the state's revenue shares, but brought about a new social coalition. How did this happen? Conventional wisdom speaks of three sets of reforms the administrator undertook, namely the transfer of a substantial portion of land to direct crown held territory (khalsa), streamlining collection procedures and investing the responsibility of revenue collection with big zamindars who were capable of paying the enhanced revenue assessment. Those who could not, the defaulters, lost their lands with the result that more than two-fifths of Bengal's revenue was paid by a small group of about thirty influential *zamindari* houses. The latter in turn worked with financiers who paid upfront the necessary revenue and even undertook the important business of remitting revenues from Bengal to Delhi and assumed a position of centrality in the set up. The best known among these merchant houses was the house of Jagat Seth.

By eliminating small and middling zamindars and investing large landed houses with the task of revenue collection, Murshid Quli's administration enjoyed greater vertical control over society and aligned it more closely to the interests and concerns of the local elite and merchant groups. His administration was also characterised by the growing preponderance of Hindu scribal groups who manned the administration and who emerged as important members of the literati, well-versed in Persian. This new arrangement worked well for more than four decades and was described by Philip Caulkins, in a seminal essay on the Bengal ruling class (1970), as a government by consent until it was de-stabilised by internal dissensions within the

The Jagat Seths were the greatest bankers of India in the eighteenth century. Founded by Manikchand, the family migrated from Rajasthan to Dhaka in the seventeenth century and from Dhaka to Murshidabad in the eighteenth. From the very beginning, the house and its founder maintained very close links with the political authorities, especially with Murshid Quli Khan the subedar of the province. The closeness of Manikchand to Murshid Quli Khan was a crucial factor in the meteoric rise of the house in the 1720's. It was during his son Fatehchand's tenure that the house reached the zenith of its power so much so that the Mughal emperor conferred on him the title of Jagat Seth as a hereditary distinction. He died in 1744 and was succeeded by his two sons Jagat Seth Mahtab Rai and Maharaja Swaroopchand and who played a key role in the Plassey conspiracy. The Plassey aftermath saw a diminution of their fortunes. The political confusion of the period after Plassey, the transfer of the government and financial administration from Murshidabad to Calcutta and the repudiation of some of the Company's debts to the banking house led to the house's decline in the early nineteenth century.

court in Murshidabad and the growing offensive of the English East India Company based in Calcutta. We will have occasion to refer to this in greater detail when we study the conflict that broke out between the English East India Company and the Bengal Nawab in 1756–57.

Murshid Quli's policies facilitated the strengthening of magnate power in Bengal. Between 1717 and 1726, a few landed houses came to the forefront and assumed responsibility for the bulk of revenue collection in Bengal. Alongside, there was the articulation of banking power embodied in the rise of the house of Jagat Seths that took over the responsibility of remitting funds from Bengal to Delhi and also for advancing money in anticipation of post harvest revenues. In fact the growing pressure on the zamindars to pay revenues in time brought bankers and financiers into great demand as they provided securities at every stage of the transaction and enjoyed great prestige at the Murshidabad court.

The new arrangements yielded immediate benefits as well, as the state was now able to extract a huge surplus from the province whose productivity enjoyed unprecedented expansion. Under his successors, the same policy was continued. By this time however, the balance lay very much with the elite groups and as Philip Caulkins so perceptively observed, the government resembled a strong corporation of internal dominant forces rather than the imposition

of an outside rule. The shift became palpably and even dangerously evident when in 1739–40, when Shujauddin Khan's successor Sarfaraz Khan was ousted by Alivardi Khan, with the help of the banking house of Jagat Seth. Under him, the break with the Mughal Empire was formalised as major appointments were made without any sanction from the emperor and the flow of tribute to the centre ceased all together. It was also during Alivardi's reign that Maratha raids directed against western Bengal strained the financial resources of the government and disrupted at least temporarily the trading profile of the province. This was partially offset by the expansion of European trade with Bengal that not only brought silver to the country, but also brought to the fore the aspirations of the English East India Company and its private traders, whose machinations contributed to the growing instability of the political system.

Bengal's experience in the first half of the eighteenth century has been a test case for demonstrating two important points; one that the period was by no means a dark and declining one and secondly that its political system reflected the vitality of social change in the period when opportunities for mobility and for consolidation of landed magnate power were available and were duly exploited. Here was veritably a case when a province emerged stronger rather than weaker in the wake of Mughal decline and when agriculture and commerce sustained a marked increase. The benefits of this expansion, however, were to be short-lived.

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Hyderabad (1707–59)

The autonomous kingdom of Hyderabad was founded in 1724 by Chin Qilich Khan a Mughal mansabdar and a favourite of the Emperor Aurangzeb. In 1724, he assumed the viceroyalty of the Deccan and the title of Nizam-ul-mulk Asaf Jah. Frustration with the politics of the imperial court led him to seek fresh pastures in the Deccan where he defeated the Mughal Governor Mubariz Khan and followed this up by consolidating his hold around Hyderabad. Here too it was 1740 that became a defining moment when the Nizam finally gave up his imperial ambitions to settle for provincial

autonomy by suppressing local dissenters and establishing an independent administrative set up. From 1762 to 1803, the state came into its own under the rule of Nizam Ali Khan Asaf Jah II when the city of Aurangabad served as the administrative and cultural centre along with the older capital of Hyderabad. From the very beginning and through its existence, the state of Hyderabad had to contend with the rivalry of the Marathas and with the ambitions of local power holders. This necessitated investment in a strong military force and in a loyal ruling class both of which required resources. As Nizam-ul-Mulk observed in his advice to his successor, 'spend your life under the canvas as this is the best method of administration'. He spoke of the need to keep part of the treasury on the march for the satisfaction of the soldiers and army officers because they were the strongest support of the state and made administration possible.

The military character of the state was reflected in its administration and particularly the emerging investment in military buildup. Land revenue collection and its deployment in the military department were of the utmost priority that generated very close bureaucratic supervision. Managerial and clerical employees maintained records, made arrangements for land revenue contracts and looked after disbursements. Their role was central to the running of the state and within a matter of decades the families associated with the offices of the Daftar-i-diwani and Daftar-i-mal (offices of finance and revenue) became major actors in the state and were ranked in the nobility. Land revenue was largely financed to contractors; assessments were based on the contract amounts for previous years and if the estimated revenue was successfully remitted then that was considered the actual revenue from that land. Contractors received two per cent commission. Another function of the *diwan* and *daftardar*s was to negotiate and distribute the urban income from tribute and loans. This included loans from bankers whose assistance was especially critical in times of conflict. The record keepers and financial officials did not function as custodians of public revenue—rather they acted as intermediaries between those who controlled and collected resources and those who needed cash for defraying expenses.

Hindu Kayasths emerged as important scribal groups who dominated the civil administration. The military was also decentralised and was under the command of old and leading families but even here Kayasths were prominent as *serishtadar*s. In the army units were organised under dual leadership: serishtadars kept the records and disbursed the pay while *jamadar*s commanded the units in the field. Even in the Nizam's household, the third administrative division, there were Kayasth record-keepers. Karen Leonard, in her work on Hyderabad (1978), suggests that Hindus, Deccanis and North Indians assumed extraordinary visibility in the state's administrative set up by the 1780s. This was a definite change as far as the composition of the nobility was concerned. On the whole power was diffused among several groups; mobility was evident in the way families travelled from afar to take part in the administrative service and the patron-client relationship became an ordering principle of the new set up.

The social context for mobility whether it was Bengal or Hyderabad or Awadh was to do with the operation of a military economy that simultaneously put pressure on resources and their extraction and brought new possibilities for communities that had the wherewithal to respond to the challenge. The Hyderabad state was by no means consistently stable—the hostility of the Marathas, of Mysore and of the Nawab of the Carnatic was a major constraint and one that was averted only after the third battle of Panipat in 1761. In 1759 the Treaty of Hyderabad was signed that made substantive territorial cessions to the English East India Company and ensured its presence in the state and slowly paving the way for the later subsidiary alliance. Between 1762 and 1803, however, the state enjoyed a period of peace and stability enabling Nizam Ali Khan to pay greater attention to consolidation and it was only in 1799 that he entered into an important engagement with the Company by which he undertook to finance an important contingent—the Russell brigade. By this time the English resident in the Nizam's court had emerged as a critical player who held the real balance of power. His close association with the Kayasth power holders as well as mercantile interests definitely gestured to the strength and importance of the ruling alliance of politics and commerce.

Awadh 1707–65

The emergence of Awadh as an autonomous *subahdari* also reflected a similar alliance of magnate and merchant power. The establishment of an independent power base was in part spurred by the personal frustration of Sadat Khan Burhan-ul Mulk (1722–39) who aspired to the control of the *wizarat* and partly by the assertion of regional politics as the only viable formation in a period of political insecurity. As governor of Awadh, Sadat Khan showed exemplary initiative in chastising rebellious chiefs and zamindars of Sambhal and Badaon and concentrated his energies in developing a power base in Awadh. The task was by no means easy as he had to deal with the disaffection and rebellions of power zamindars of Sambhal and Badaon and the Banaras region. Success in this department was followed by expansion of territories but did not yield the necessary political capital at the centre. His imperial ambitions were continually thwarted by court intrigues and factionalism, and in a desperate attempt to reclaim his power, he contracted an unholy pact with the Persian conqueror Nadir Shah, to serve his self interest. The agreement rebounded on him as the Persian ruler stepped up his claims during the sack of Delhi (1739–40) and held Sadat Khan responsible for making good the payments. The humiliation and the hopelessness of the situation drove Sadat Khan to suicide. His office in Awadh passed on to his son-in-law Safdar Jang who was confirmed in his succession by Nadir Shah on payment of two crores of rupees.

The state that Safdar Jang inherited was predicated on a pragmatic alliance with the magnates and zamindars of the region. They became bulwarks of the new revenue system that was able to generate considerable revenues for the exchequer and benefited from the restoration of political security as well as of accelerated commercialisation that brought to the fore revenue farmers, traders and bankers who became key figures in the evolving political set up. These tendencies were strengthened in the reign of Safdar Jang (1739–54) whose rule saw the advent of the Marathas in the region as he invited their support against the Bangash Afghans and succeeded in occupying Farukhabad. Unlike his counterparts in Bengal, he pursued his imperial ambitions and was evidently among

the most powerful of Mughal nobles. In 1743, he was appointed *mir atish* or chief of artillery and subahdar of Kashmir. In 1748, he was able to secure the subahdari of Allahabad and also to gain the post of wazir. This enabled him to ensure smooth succession for his son Shuja-ud-daulah. By 1750, however, the situation at the centre began to turn against him as a powerful faction headed by Nasir Jang of Hyderabad and the Bangash and Rohillas threatened his power forcing him to solicit the support of the Marathas.

The reign of Shuja-ud-daulah (1754–75) marked a turning point for the history of Awadh as well as for the history of India. It was during his reign that the English East India Company extended its influence through the subsidiary treaty that slowly but steadily ate into the sovereignty of the state. It was also a period when centrifugal forces became obvious as feudatory zamindars asserted their independence, setting up smaller fiefdoms (such as the Rajas of Banaras), and occupying an important intermediate position between the rising power of the English in Bengal and the sovereigns of Awadh. This came in the wake of a brief period of spectacular success for Shuja: the receipt of the wizarat in 1759 and the successful partnership with the Afghan ruler Ahmed Shah Abdali who routed the Marathas in the battlefield of Panipat in 1761. Four years later, Shuja would become party to a subsidiary alliance that would eat into the entrails of the Awadh state leaving it financially exhausted and politically impotent. We shall have occasion to refer to this when we track the rise of British power.

Social Movements and Regional States

Successor states were but one manifestation of the processes of regionalism that characterised the political topography of eighteenth century India. A very different set of circumstances operated in the case of social movements translating into political entities in the eighteenth century—a development that also testifies to the inherent fluidity of the period that made it possible for a range of social groups to improve and articulate their status. Ordinarily, opportunities for social mobility are made possible when there is an expansion

of economic opportunities or when there is a growing pressure on territory—a land hunger that drives people to move out and thereafter, aspire to a higher ascriptive caste status. Circumstances in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries worked to this end at several levels. We have, for instance, the case of Sikhs, Jats and Marathas, whose numbers were largely drawn from lower ranks of peasant and cultivating society as well as from groups on the fringes of settled agriculture coming forward to support war-bands in search of territory and cohering around a set of socially inclusive doctrines. Starting off as a reaction to the dominance of revenue extractors in the Deccan, the Marathas represented the coming of age of local co-sharers of revenue who used their military service as a vantage point to claim a new and exalted status in the seventeenth century and to enjoy certain vested rights in land. The term Maratha, according to Stewart Gordon, began to represent by the seventeenth century a category of service elite drawn from diverse castes who in return for their military service to Muslim sultanates in the Deccan began to enjoy both status and rights in land. The formation of the category coincided with the rise of a social movement based on inclusive *bhakti* that convulsed society in Maharashtra and gave an added fillip to ordinary peasant cultivators' aspirations of a new status that military service promised. Exploiting these conditions of social turbulence, Shivaji Bhonsle, belonging to an influential *deshmukh* (landed) family rebelled against the authority of the Deccan Sultanate of Bijapur to found an independent polity. Shivaji's political experiment—the formation of the *swarajya*—had as its basis the support of deshmukh families and their retainers and supporters who were more than willing to make the most of military opportunities. His death in 1680 was followed by a period of extreme instability as conditions of protracted conflict encouraged local revenue intermediaries to rally around different contenders—Mughals and Marathas alike. Aurangzeb tried in vain to subjugate the Maratha territory but his operations

Deshmukh

Village headman who also had responsibility for supplying troops. As Maratha warriors, they became an elite thanks to their rights to land revenue.

Swarajya

Literally home land, this had a specific connotation under the Maratha ruler Shivaji Bhonsle who carved out a specific territory for himself and his followers.

were largely frustrated by the guerilla tactics of Maratha bands under the leadership of Rajaram and his widow Tarabai. The tide definitely began to turn against the Mughals after 1705 when Aurangzeb abandoned the Deccan and Maratha bands remained untamed. The conditions of Mughal decline in the first half of the eighteenth century encouraged Maratha leaders to step up their operations and carve out zones of influence far removed from their original nucleus in the western Deccan. This coincided with the release of the Maratha regent Shahu in 1707 and around whom a powerful alignment of Maratha leaders and the powerful Brahmin family of Peshwa Balaji Viswanath assembled to give a very definite direction to Maratha politics. Between 1713 and 1761 when Maratha expansion was checked by the forces of the Afghan king Ahmad Shah Abdali in the historic battle-fields of Panipat, the power of the Maratha Confederacy as a major contender for paramountcy was evident to any contemporary observer.

Conventional histories of Maratha expansion tend to emphasise the growing influence of the Peshwas in Poona and the countervailing influence of an expanding confederacy outside it. In real terms this meant, first, the imposition of an effective system of extracting tribute claims from a wide area within the country the responsibility of which was designated to different *sardars* and second, the establishment of a powerful if not centralised state in Poona. Balaji Viswanath (1660–1720) was a shrewd financial administrator who was able to secure for his king, three imperial *farmans* in addition to the full and undiminished sovereignty in the swarajya, the right to levy *chauth* and *sardeshmukhi* in the six *subas* of the Deccan as well as in Mysore, Trichinopoly and Tanjore. In exchange for the 180 million rupees that became due as a consequence of the chauth and sardeshmukhi claims, the Marathas were required to maintain a cavalry contingent of 15,000 for imperial service. Under his successor, Baji Rao, Maratha power steadily expanded even as he attempted to centralise the administration in Poona. The central administration headed by

Chauth and Sardeshmukhi

Chauth was a tax or tribute imposed, from the early eighteenth century, by the Marathas. It was nominally levied at 25% on revenue or produce, whence the name. The *sardeshmukhi* was an additional 10% levy on top of the *chauth*.

the Peshwa was assisted by a council of eight ministers or the *ashtapradhan* and subsidiary functionaries like the *chitnis*, *podnis* and *fadnis*. The authority of this central structure however, did not go beyond the swaraj as the ruler granted the best *jagirs* to his most trusted sardars whose energies resulted in the creation of multiple spheres of influence that subsequently became known as the Maratha Confederacy. Under Baji Rao I (1720–40) Maratha expansion would appear to have reached its greatest limits as he himself put forward a policy of northward expansion for the establishment of a *Hindupadpadshahi* (Hindu empire) that would replace the rotting Mughal edifice. His project was not without basis for by this time, the Mughal Empire had scarcely any real control over its peripheries—Bengal, the Deccan and the Rajput states, and even in areas near its core—Awadh and Farukhabad for example. Under the circumstances, Baji Rao as well as the inner circle in Poona planned a course of expansion that would strike at the declining Mughal authority in Gujarat and Malwa and push the frontiers of expansion right up to the northern heartland.

The strategy was put to good effect as the following decades saw Maratha bands attacking one or two or more fronts during each military season. The offensive of the Dabhade-Gaekwads against Gujarat, the Holkars in Khandesh, the Bhonsles in Nagpur among others led the charge and in a matter of decades were able to found regional Maratha houses in central and western India. What is especially striking about the development is the energy and intrepidity of young commanders, even teenage soldiers whose ability was promoted by the Peshwa and Shahu. Mughal reprisals against the Marathas were not significantly effective—in 1733, the Mughals were once more defeated. Negotiations over revenue demands in 1736 were equally ineffective as Baji Rao kept escalating revenue demands that included a hereditary state for himself, jagir grants for his most loyal leaders, immediate cash payments, full control over Malwa and the right to nominate all officials in the Deccan and personal rights to five per cent of the revenue of the Deccan. Maratha claims by their nature were antithetical to the interest of the Nizam of Hyderabad whose support the Mughal solicited in 1737 when a Mughal-Maratha campaign went under way.

The campaign that followed saw a recurrence of older patterns of offense and resistance. The Marathas continued to follow a policy of cutting off sources of food supplies that led to large-scale abandonment of troops from the Mughal and the Nizam's army. The campaign ended with the Treaty of Bhopal (January 1739). The Nizam agreed to cede the whole suba of Malwa to the Peshwa and relinquished complete sovereignty over all lands between the Narmada and Chambal rivers. Just as victory seemed complete, Baji Rao died in 1740, a year that witnessed the invasion of Nadir Shah and the sack of Delhi. Between this date and 1761 when the Marathas were defeated in the third battle of Panipat, the focus was on settlement and consolidation of the territories conquered and one which involved a close association of bankers in the administration and remission of revenue. In fact between 1740 and 1760, distinct Maratha regional polities emerged in the newly conquered areas and which supported a newly emerging political economy. While we will have occasion to refer to these new arrangements later, it is important to keep in mind that the new political balance represented by the rise of the Marathas and the other regional powers had been sustained by major social changes in the period—the rise of new social groups who exploited the opportunities of transition politics.

A similar set of tendencies was evident in the case of both Sikh power in the Punjab as well as of Jat expansion in Northern India. In both cases, there was a combination of agrarian colonising tendencies with the assertion of local landlord power that was able to assimilate pioneer peasants. To this was added, at least in the case of Sikh power, the inspiration of a local faith that depressed if not obliterated hierarchies of caste and rallied around a set of egalitarian ideals. Originating as a typical Hindu revival movement with a strong social and egalitarian message around a line of gurus who developed community-based institutions and practices, (*sangat* and *langar*) the movement assumed a distinct political and militant character in the wake of state pressure. In 1699, the tenth Guru, Gobind Singh, in response to the increasing persecution faced by the community of believers as well as to the growing dissensions within the community thanks to the competition among local

Masand
Local Sikh officials in charge of designated sangats or congregations

leaders or *masands*, took the momentous decision of establishing the Khalsa brotherhood. The idea behind the decision to create the brotherhood was to disinvest the masands of any authority and assume real power in the Khalsa that became representative of the Guru. The new initiates into the brotherhood were expected to maintain five obligatory insignia that marked the community that was prepared to stake its claims to territory, secular and sacral power. Notwithstanding detractors, the call of the Khalsa resonated far and wide as increasing numbers of armed Singhs came to take their place in the new brotherhood and send waves of apprehension through the Mughal provincial authorities as well as to the local hill chiefs of the Shiwaliks.

Singhs
Literally, lion. The name appended to all male Sikh initiates

The militarisation of the Sikh panth reflected the growing presence of the Jats in its fold and coincided with their expansion in the aftermath of Mughal decline. This came into sharp focus when after the death of Guru Gobind Singh, leadership was assumed by Banda Bahadur who along with his following staged an uprising, collected revenues from Hissar, stormed Samana in 1709 and by December 1710 occupied the entire *sarkar* of Sarhind and several *parganas* in the sarkar of Hissar. Here he established a rudimentary political set up, appointing his officers, minting his coins and keeping the resistance alive. His execution by the Mughal state in 1716 did not put an end to the problem—successive Mughal governors, Abdus Samad Khan and Zakariya Khan took on the task of subduing the rebellions. The pressure of the Mughal state combined with the attacks of the Persians and Afghans on the empire created extreme duress for the roving bands but ironically also provided them with the opportunity of establishing pockets of influence and of controlling Amritsar, which emerged as a nodal centre. Even while suffering the most extraordinary devastation at the hands of Afghan soldiers, the Sikhs managed to retain their aspirations and their martial activities which, after 1761, slowly

Sarkar, Pargana
Mughal administrative divisions; the Mughal Empire was divided into *subas*—subas into sarkars and sarkars into parganas.

congealed around a more defined territorial space. Local leaders like Jai Singh Kanhaiya and Jassa Singh Aluwalia in charge of small well-defined bands, occupied territory in the Bari Doab and by 1765 Sikh rule was a reality. In this year the Singhs formally declared their sovereignty by striking coins at Lahore after its occupation by three of its leaders. Sikh rule was acknowledged by the Mughals and the local rulers like the chiefs of Jammu and Kangra.

An important feature in Sikh expansion was the idea of *rakhi* or protection (one-fifth of the produce) to cultivation against all outsiders, including government officials and the institution of the *misl* that were kinship combinations which occupied territory. It was a confederacy not in the same way as that of the Marathas but a unit nonetheless that was given the responsibility of maintaining control over a designated territory. Territory was often occupied by the misl as a unit, and sometimes by more than two misls. The combination of a large number of misls came to be known as the *dal khalsa*. Campaigns were planned by leaders in a collective fashion and the resolution passed thereafter was known as the *gurmata*, which was morally binding on all Singhs. J. S. Grewal suggests that this gave an impressive degree of cohesion to Sikh action and imparted at the same time a lot of flexibility to its practical application and made 'the Singhs much more formidable than the other contestants for power'.

Misl
The 12 states of the Sikh confederacy were known as *misls*. While they competed amongst themselves for power and territory, they acted in unison in relation to other states.

It is difficult to compute the forces at the disposal of the Sikh chiefs. The number of identifiable chiefs between Jammu and the Indus in 1770 was about 60 and who commanded varying resources. The eminent chiefs in this period were Jassa Singh Ahluwalia, Charhat Singh Sukerchakia, Hari Singh Bhangi and his sons Jhanda Singh and Ganda Singh, Jai Singh Kanhaiya, Gujjar Singh and Jassa Singh Ramgarhia. There were middle-level leaders as well and some Sikh chiefs in the Mughal province of Delhi. All the chiefs were independent of others in the government and administration of their territories. Between 1765 and 1799 when Ranjit Singh united the misls to create an empire, the chiefs were left to devise local arrangements for ensuring a degree of continuity in revenue

and judicial arrangements. It would take a quarter of a century for the scattered principalities to be brought under unified central rule that promoted political and economic security.

What stands out in the history of Sikh political assertion is the capability of local leaders to mobilise the energies of peasants and present a concerted stand against state power based on an ideology of personal faith. That the chiefs were capable of mounting forces and mobilising resources to maintain their fiefs and take to the battlefield speaks of a social dynamism that seems to be typical of eighteenth century military entrepreneurship. This was evident in the case of the Jat power in Bharatpur as well and whose antecedents were established by Churaman Jat (1695–1721) who emerged in the last years of the seventeenth century as a new militant leader supported by a restive peasantry that displayed a remarkable solidarity with their class leaders. The Jats were an agriculturist and pastoral caste inhabiting the Delhi-Mathura region. The first revolt took place in 1699 when the emperor had to proceed in person to suppress it. The guerilla raids of Churaman Jat strained the Mughal state as it yielded to his demands. Under his nephew Badan Singh, the Jats stabilised their local power base, expanded into the territory between the Jamuna and Rajasthan and constructed formidable fortresses at Dig, Khumber, Bharatpur and Ver. Under Suraj Mal, (1756–63), Jat power assumed greater proportions as he made a bid for mainstream politics and received the *faujdari* of Mathura. The martial energies of the Jats were recognised by all contemporary powers—the Marathas, Rohillas and the British, and it took more than half a century of pacification by the latter to contain them. Suraj Mal's efforts at centralisation, however, proved ephemeral and ended with his death in 1763, which was followed by the virtual disappearance of the Jat state.

The establishment of the smaller Afghan principalities of Farukhabad and Rohilkhand completed the mosaic of small states in northern India. These kingdoms, referred to as Muslim conquest states by C. A. Bayly, embodied the spirit of military entrepreneurship that had always been a feature of Afghan migrations. The aftermath of Persian and Afghan invasions enabled not merely Afghan soldiers to circulate in the military market of north India but also enabled

some of them to carve out principalities that became important urban centres as well. The states founded by Rohilla mercenaries and the Bangash Afghans did not rely on older forms of land control but on effective military action that defeated local Rajput lineages and subsequently converted them into Muslim *qasba* towns. Without advantages of kin-based and clan support, these states buttressed their newly acquired position by producing legitimising narratives tracing their genealogy to the time of the Prophet and by contracting suitable marriage alliances. At the same time, the importance of local co-operation was never forgotten as they enlisted Rajput soldiers and also brought in large numbers of cultivating castes and merchant groups to organise a viable and cohesive state unit.

View from the South: States and Sovereigns

Political formation in the peninsula in the eighteenth century was characterised by the formation of strong centralised states that also demonstrated a strong interest in developing maritime power. The two major states to emerge in this region were the Nawabi state of Arcot and the state of Mysore that threw up, especially in the latter half of the century, the most important leaders of resistance against the British. The Nizamat of Arcot emerged out of the larger Mughal *suba* (province) of the Carnatic and like its counterparts in the north was a successor state operating under the carapace of Mughal sovereignty. The founders of its Nawayat dynasty were Daud Khan Panni and Sa'adatullah Khan whose ancestors had been part of Bijapuri service. Daud himself appears to have switched over to imperial Mughal service and in 1700 was associated with Zulfiqar Khan in charge of the Deccan campaigns. His services earned him a handsome mansab of 6000 in 1704. His presence on the coast of the Coromandel inevitably brought him into contact with the English Company very early on and part of his political and fiscal strategy seems to have been to assume some degree of control over trade-related matters. Selective patronage of one European trading company over another, support extended to local and Pathan merchants of Sao Tome indicated the commercial

orientation of the emerging Nizamat and one that was strongly reinforced by his successor Sa'adatullah Khan. The latter vigorously carved out a viable domain in the Karnataka *payanghat* deploying the services of Khatris and Saraswats who played a similar role to that of the Kayasths in Hyderabad. One of his pet projects was the idea of building a fortified town in imitation of Company fortifications and one that he developed while building Kovalam. The project did not come to much but it clearly reflected a strong concern to develop a maritime basis for his power.

From the 1740s Arcot became the site of a protracted struggle between the European East India companies, especially the French and the English, both of whom had important trading settlements along the coast. Issues of disputed succession coinciding with the outbreak of hostilities in Europe meant a permanent state of hostility with fortunes swinging wildly. Three Carnatic Wars fought between 1745 and 1763 punctuated by years of truce and peace eventually established the supremacy of the English Company over its rivals. From this point to the fall of Mysore, the Carnatic came under the gradual stranglehold of the Company with its debt-ridden Nawab unable to maintain even vestiges of his old authority.

The case of Mysore was even more spectacular. Originating as a vice-royalty under the Vijayanagara Empire in the sixteenth century, Mysore was transformed into an autonomous state by the Wodeyar chieftaincy in the seventeenth century. The new principality afforded opportunities for dynamic military commanders and one such instance was the career of Haider Ali, a junior officer who rose from the ranks to assume political power by eliminating the prime minister of the Wodeyar state and thereafter reducing the Wodeyar ruler to a titular head. Ruling his state with a tight fist, Haidar adopted a policy of military modernisation that necessitated what Burton Stein has called an application of military fiscalism. Under his successor Tipu Sultan, this assumed very large proportions and became part of a massive political project to establish centralised control over the revenues of the state and that included commercial income in a big way. Haider himself concentrated on first consolidating his power by subduing refractory and hereditary intermediaries like the deshmukhs and

poligars and then on building a European-type army that he hoped to use against the English, whom he correctly identified as his real adversaries. Both these strategies required the enhancement of an efficient revenue base and a system of direct taxation. The land revenue system was based on a detailed classificatory survey with rents determined by the nature of the soil and its productivity.

What stands out in the case of the Mysorean state was the extent of its centralised military orientation and scrupulous control over the state's fiscal resources that alone could sustain the military machine. This along with Tipu's policies towards trade and commerce has been taken by some historians as emblematic of a mercantilist state that was early modern in its conception. There is no doubt that Tipu's state attempted to modernise agriculture by repairing irrigation schemes and even undertook to introduce the state as the biggest merchant in the economy. In 1793, for instance, Tipu Sultan launched what can be termed as a state corporation with plans to monopolise trade and manufacture. We have important and interesting documents that speak of Tipu's correspondence with the ruler of Muscat who was, at around the same time, entertaining commercial aspirations. All these activities were aimed primarily at augmenting the state's resources and according to Irfan Habib fell short of a genuine modernisation project.

Further south as Ashin Dasgupta's masterly work has demonstrated, the state of Travancore under its ruler Martanda Varma (1729–58) displayed the same spirit of mercantile enterprise and preference for bureaucratic centralisation. In the fragmented region of Malabar where local rivalries between small states had kept alive a state of endemic conflict and had enabled European trading companies, especially the Dutch and the English, to steadily erode the independence of the merchant and manufacturer, the rise of Travancore represented a turning point. Under Martanda Varma, the state came into its own as it eliminated the independence of the feudal nobility, expanded its dominions by building a strong army composed of Marava mercenaries and finally defeated the Dutch in the historic battle of Colachel in 1741. By this time, he had constructed a powerful bureaucratic state that demanded revenues which were ensured by the imposition of a state monopoly on the

pepper trade and subsequently on all trade that passed along the Malabar Coast. Under his successor, Dharma Raja Rama Varma (1758–98), Travancore became an important centre of arts and scholarship and displayed some of the features of early modernity.

All the states that we have so far mentioned came under the influence of the English East India Company referred to by C. A. Bayly as the new power, especially after 1765 when it embarked upon a more concerted plan of military excursions and political control, and to which we shall have occasion to refer later. A brief history of this new power, however, is important here, especially in view of the fact that it was during this century of transition that it set out by chance and intent to acquire an empire in Hindustan. Emerging as a chartered Company with the blessings of Queen Elizabeth, it began its trading operations in India from 1613 and proceeded to establish a string of factories or warehouses along the coast. From modest beginnings, the Company gradually extended its operations with the three centres of Bombay, Madras and Calcutta emerging as major city settlements and where the Company and their merchants enjoyed a relative degree of independence and immunity. Until the 1740's, the Company maintained a low profile and insisted only on the enforcement of their royal farmans which from time to time gave them important benefits of exemption and preferential custom payments. However, even by this time, there were two important changes already under way that presaged a more interventionist stance on the part of the Company servants. One was the growing private trade of the Company servants, who, to make up for small salaries and risky appointments, were given the license to trade between the ports of Asia and which by the 1740s was becoming substantial enough for them to demand greater leeway and privileges. Secondly, the slow decline of Indian commercial centres and their export trade in the Indian Ocean in the wake of Mughal decline saw a proportionate expansion of trade in the Company settlements of Calcutta and Madras, and whose shipping began to dominate the sea-lanes of the Indian Ocean. One of the most important consequences of the latter development was a growing tendency at least on the part of some sections of Indian commercial society to align themselves

with the Company as a counterpoise to the ruling Mughal and/or provincial authority. Backed by such alignments, the Company felt emboldened to intervene in local political disputes and play the role of a mediator only to finally undermine the existing political alliance. The battle of Plassey in Bengal (1757) and the Castle Revolution in Surat (1759) testified to this new moment in India's political history.

India's Political Economy in the Eighteenth Century

We have had occasion to comment on the material circumstances that permitted a refiguring of political relationships in eighteenth century India. We have, for instance, suggested that in some cases, there was concrete evidence of increasing productivity reflected in higher assessment and collection figures (Bengal and parts of Awadh) and that the pressures of war and centralisation encouraged local rulers to enhance their revenue collection procedures and to institute new arrangements. Military expenditure introduced new and important links into agrarian society and facilitated the penetration of both rural elites as well as commercial groups into the intermediate economy of the bazaar. At the same time military expenditure had important economic effects also creating and consolidating a vast military labour market. Military-related consumption fuelled local trade in many enclaves in northern India.

The links between revenue arrangements and trade were central to the working of regional systems in eighteenth century India. Without for a moment discounting the obvious decline that set in the economy of late Mughal India when links between important centres were severely disrupted and there was a concurrent decline in aristocratic consumption not to mention the dislocation in overseas trade, it is important to identify some regional economies where trade exchanges and revenue arrangements converged to ensure a robust and cash-filled economy. Bengal is the obvious case in point here, and until the Plassey revolution that completely and irremediably reversed the situation, the economy showed signs of

vitality and robust growth. Bengal's flourishing trade in cloth, the operations of its bankers like the Jagat Seths who undertook revenue management and remittances, the increasing bargaining power of weavers and artisans reflected conditions of productivity and expansion. In the eastern portions of the Gangetic valley, there were signs of commercialisation and growth of markets. At the same time as regional states consolidated their power in the latter decades of the century, there were important advances in productivity and trade that was immediately reflected in a proliferation of the credit or *hundi* network. These indigenous credit networks intersected in an important way with imperial ambitions in late eighteenth century India as local bankers came forward to bankroll the Company's political projects.

While admittedly the estimates that we have for growth and productivity in the eighteenth century are fragmented and scarce, we can safely reflect on the conditions of mobility and fluidity that characterised settlement, agrarian colonisation and state building in the eighteenth century. The new revenue arrangements that accompanied state building provided a great deal of flexibility allowing astute revenue farmers like Almas Ali who held districts yielding one third of the revenue of Awadh to distinguish themselves by their acumen. Likewise, we just have to recall the energies of the Jat and Maratha castes, the agrarian expansion of Bhumihars in Bihar and the increasing presence of mercenaries in the labour markets to reflect on the range of opportunities that were made available in a century of change. Conditions of monetisation and the expansion of a cash network, of steady agrarian colonisation in some parts of the subcontinent, and the cash and military requirements of the post-Mughal regimes facilitated the crystallisation of a new elite, constituted by both zamindars and men of the pen and who became standard bearers of a new scribal culture—of what Alam and Subrahmanyam call the culture of the Karanam. Their concerns and their active role in local politics were also reflected in the production of new histories and literary forms in the eighteenth century. This brings us to the final question of cultural practices and productions of the eighteenth century and whether we can track these signs of the early modern.

Defining the early modern especially in the context of the eighteenth century is not easy. The term is not intended to convey a chronological category—not a period with dates and coordinates but as a conceptual one that engages with elements of thought and practice around sovereignty, law and politics. These shifts were evident in *niti* or ethical texts in Telugu that look at the state in secular and rational terms and also in the production of vernacular histories that balanced older memory with emerging practices of rational knowledge. Kumkum Chatterjee's work on eighteenth century history suggests how a new kind of critique was developing of early colonial rule even while older indigenous traditions were being projected. We also have the instance of several histories of Mysore produced in the eighteenth century—some written in the direct manner of fact tradition of the *bakhar*, others in more sophisticated Persian models and yet others written as memoirs, but all making claims to historicity. The preoccupation with the causal, the sequential and the responsible thus became features of a new sensibility that seems to have been produced in the conditions of the eighteenth century. A heightened appreciation of individual capability also distinguished some of these narratives that place in perspective the military orientation of the eighteenth century. It was a century, when military adventurers thrived and when important innovations were carried out in the departments of infantry and artillery.

Bakhar

Generally understood to mean historical writing or narrative derived from the Persian word Khair or bakhair although this view has been contested by some scholars.

Herman Goetz in an important article in the 1950's spoke of the cultural vitality of the eighteenth century that seemed to be strangely at variance with its political and economic denouement. What recent researches have done is not merely to contest assumptions of decline but to reflect on the fluidity of social conditions that characterised the eighteenth century, especially as relatively stable structures made way for more porous regional formations. In terms of cultural production like art and music, the century was one of innovation and creativity for even as patronage moved from the centre to the region, the emergence of eminent artists and composers and their improvisation with new forms set the stage

for enormous creative expression. In the case of North India, we have for instance the achievements of Neamat Khan Sadarang, the protagonist for the '*khyal*' that was to become a dominant idiom for classical music. In southern India, the patronage of the Maratha Court at Tanjore ensured important and even theoretical advances in musicological production while the emergence of the trinity of composers—Tyagaraja, Diksitar and Syama Sastri—provided a rich repertoire of compositions that became foundational for articulating a distinct classical tradition in the nineteenth century. The century likewise saw impressive advances in poetry and art—the replication of miniature art in regional styles and the development of Urdu and Punjabi poetry reflected new expressions of sensibility. Religion played a major role in the articulation of local and regional sensibilities.

One of the most influential figures in Muslim religious life in the eighteenth century was Shah Waliullah (1703–62), the Naqshbandi Sufi who was part of a circle that attempted to set new standards of fidelity to the traditions of the Prophet's sayings. What is interesting is that his teachings were supported by dynamic urban traders as well as among other groups who were undoubtedly responding to the flux of the period. In fact Jamal Malik argues that doubt and skepticism were emerging as important features of the new world view in the eighteenth century and that music played a part in this as well in that it became not just a medium of entertainment but a source of integrating complex social realities. The khyal provided more scope for individual improvisation just like poetry because of it's inherent fluidity that could accommodate heretical ideas and upset older and more embedded structures.

The strength of regionalism in India was short-lived. Even before the century came to a close, most of the regional powers had capitulated to the strength of the English East India Company, which by 1818 had a fully fledged empire to govern. What made this possible and what the special circumstances were that allowed a company of traders to become rulers of a subcontinent is a question that historians still quibble over. We shall attempt to answer this question as we track the rise of the Company in Indian politics, whether it was only due to the superior military technology of the

latter or whether there were other social and commercial factors at play.

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Chapter 2

The Establishment of the Company Bahadur 1757–1857

How was India won? This is a question that has often been asked but never fully answered. Was the conquest of India an accident or was it the outcome of a pre-meditated project? Was it a logical sequence of political processes and tendencies that had been maturing through the century enabling the most competent of the claimants to assume paramountcy? Was it a military feat that epitomised the success of the European modern over Indian tradition? There are no simple and easy answers and what we can hope to do is to critically examine the history of Company expansion in India, the strategies it deployed, the alliances it contracted and to place them in the larger social context of change and transformation in the period.

In 1757, the English East India Company took the first major step in building the Indian empire. At Plassey, its army under Colonel Robert Clive vanquished the forces of the Bengal Nawab Siraj-ud-daulah, thereby setting the stage for a formal induction of the Company into the state's political structure. Until this historic date, the English East India Company like its Dutch and French counterparts had functioned as traders, overbearing and grasping, but conforming nevertheless to the sovereignty of the realm. The trading interests of the European companies were largely dictated by the demand for spices and pepper in Europe and were supported by a complex system of intra-Asian trade in cloth in the Indian Ocean. The companies in varying degrees, allowed their servants to

participate in the trade of the Indian Ocean to compensate for low salaries with the result that the servants and private traders became over time a powerful lobby that urged political expansion. As Eric Stokes observed in an important essay, Company servants were significant founders of empire and the Plassey revolution was the first English essay in private profiteering on a grand scale.

Early Beginnings

Founded by a royal charter on 31 December 1599 with the seal and support blessings of Queen Elizabeth, the English East India Company was a joint stock company of London merchants. It was originally intended to combine against the competition of the Dutch in the Eastern trade that held the key to prosperity accruing from the distribution of spices in Europe. The new Company was given the monopoly over trade between England and Asia and for which it had the implicit right to use force. Armed with these powers, the Company started on a tentative note—formally commencing its trade operations in 1613 and subsequently expanding its presence. While technically the Company was a distinct organisation detached from the state, the inter-linkages between them were not insignificant for the Company owed its influence and privileges to royal prerogative. The affairs of the Company were looked after in London by the East India House consisting of twenty-four directors and a supporting cast of clerical servants. In India, the factories were headed by a Governor and his Council. The organisation of the Company changed from time to time. In its early years, the Company faced the challenges of interlopers and in the late seventeenth century, it also faced the opposition of a rival English company. In 1708, the two companies were merged to form the United Company of Merchants of England Trading to the East Indies, commonly styled the Honourable East India Company.

For the greater part of the seventeenth century the position of the English East India Company and its servants was fragile. Notwithstanding the naval strength of the Company, which it put to use from time to time to score a point or two against port officers

and local governors, the Company had to take cognisance of the power of the Grand Mogul whose permission was essential for the successful prosecution of trade. However, from the very beginning, the Company was determined to develop power bases where they could exercise a measure of autonomy and attract local merchant and manufacturing groups to service their operations. By the mid-seventeenth century, the Company had a score of factories and by the end of the century was firmly ensconced in the three major coastal cities of Madras (1640), Bombay (1668) and Calcutta (1690). Likewise the Dutch and the French were settled in coastal entrepots like Surat, Masulipatam and Pondichery. The early development of these cities was based on important networks of partnership between Indian merchants and European traders who along with the Company depended critically on local merchants for supplies and credit provisioning.

The expansionist politics of the English East India Company has often been studied in the context of mercantilism that persuaded states in Europe to augment their treasure reserves and encourage merchants and corporations to gain economic concessions by the use of force if necessary. From the very beginning, we see that the Company used force to push its interests and to realise certain financial and diplomatic advantages. Early governors like Sir Josiah Childe for instance were explicit in advocating a forward policy of expansion, a policy that was in line with the aggressive orientation of the Stuart monarchy at home that pursued an 'equally bold and authoritarian imperial policy around the globe'. However to trace a direct line of continuity from Childe to Clive would be an exaggeration of the Company's intent as well as to ignore the changes that took place in the political landscape of India.

The Company and the Nawabs of Bengal

Any analysis of the Company's expansion in Bengal needs to take note of the structure of Company and private trading in Bengal and of its repercussions on the internal political structure. As mentioned earlier, the Company in its official capacity enjoyed a

Nawabs of Bengal	
Murshid Quli Khan (1717–27)	Najabut Ali Khan (1766–70)
Shuja-ud-Din Muhammad Khan (1727–39)	Ashraf Ali Khan (1770–70)
Sarfaraz Khan (1739–40)	Mubaraq Ali Khan (1770–93)
Alivardi Khan (1740–56)	Baber Ali Khan (1793–1810)
Siraj-ud-Daula (1756–57)	Zainul Abedin Ali Khan (1810–21)
Mir Jafar Ali Khan (1757–60)	Ahmad Ali Khan (1821–24)
Mir Qasim (1760–63)	Mubarak Ali Khan II (1824–38)
Mir Jafar Ali Khan (1763–65)	Mansur Ali Khan (1838–80 abdicated)
Najimuddin Ali Khan (1765–66)	

monopoly of trade between England and Asia while its servants were allowed to trade in a private capacity within the Indian Ocean—in what came to be known as 'country trade'. Interlopers, those who directly defied the Company's monopoly, in any case, breached the Company monopoly frequently. The problem of illegal trade was also exacerbated by the private trade activities of Company servants whose operations became a serious source of embarrassment as they began to demand all sorts of exemptions and privileges from the local authorities. Nowhere was this more evident than in Bengal whose nawabs recognised the utter audacity and illegality of these demands and resisted the claims whenever possible. The most significant development in the Company's trade in the eighteenth century was the grant of an imperial farman from the Mughal Emperor Farrukh Siyar in 1717 for duty free trade in return for an annual payment of Rs 3000. According to this farman, 'all goods and necessaries which their (the Company's) factors bring or carry away either by land or water were to be free from custom duties'. The farman was clearly a major coup as it removed several obstacles to English trade—official trade that is, even though it did not specify it as such. Thus it was not clear, whether this exemption applied to goods belonging to the Company only or to the goods of the Company as well as its factors. Consequently taking advantage of the ambiguity, Company servants demanded application of this provision to include both inland and private trade. The farman also permitted the Company to rent thirty eight villages adjacent to Calcutta for which the diwan and the Nawab were called upon to give permission. The Nawab was also to allow the Company to use the royal mint for minting coins

out of its imported bullion 'if it not be against the king's interests'. As it happened the last two provisions were never permitted by the nawabs of Bengal.

The wrangles over the interpretation of the farman became the basis of a long-standing disagreement between the Company and the Bengal Nawabs. The chronic abuse of *dastaks* and the duty-free inland trade demanded by Company servants both of which cost the state valuable revenue became major irritants for the rulers. By the 1720s and 1730s, the growth of Calcutta and English trade and shipping enabled the Company to take the offensive and put pressure on the administration by occasionally blockading the port of Hugli and thereby undermining the operations of local merchants and Armenians who shifted the pressure back to the administration. What is important for us to remember here is that the first quarter of the eighteenth century witnessed the rapid development of the Calcutta fleet and British trade and the success of the English captains to draw the freight traffic of local merchants to their vessels. The expansion of private trade lent an edge to their demands and it was only a matter of time before the nawabs of Bengal came up with a strong rejoinder.

Dastak

Dastak was a trade permit that exempted European traders from paying customs duties on their private trade.

It was under Murshid Quli Khan's successor Shujauddin Khan (1727–39), that the issue of dastak abuse became a pressing one and the government made it clear that the farman was intended to cover only the export trade of the Company and that it was wholly unacceptable to entertain such unbound privileges as demanded by the Company servants. The situation worsened in Alivardi's times (1740–56) but the Nawab, distracted by the Maratha raids in his western provinces opted for a compromise solution by persuading the English to make him adequate financial contributions. It was under his grandson Siraj-ud-daulah that the situation reached a breaking point and the young Nawab articulated with clarity the three main grievances that he had against the English Company. The indictment was telling for it revealed how systematically the Company had built up its power base and how its demands went against the notions of sovereign authority. Siraj pointed out how

they had built up the fortifications of the city of Calcutta, how they were abusing the dastaks and how they had begun by providing asylum to his fugitive subjects thereby building Calcutta as an alternative power centre to Murshidabad, his capital city. These were intolerable and as he wrote to Khwaja Wajid, 'if they will promise to remove the foregoing complaints of their conduct ... I will pardon their fault and permit their residence here'. The English on their part were in no mood to entertain the Nawab's suggestions and this recalcitrance, according to Sushil Chaudhuri, made way for the Plassey revolution.

The course of events went as follows. On his accession in 1756, Siraj ordered the English to remove the fortifications they had added presumably in response to a perceived threat from the French Company in Chandernagore and to release the fugitive Krishna Ballabh who had been charged with fraud. The Company chose to ignore these demands, at which the Nawab made a daring and successful attack on Calcutta on 20 June precipitating the big showdown. By this time, the durbar was in the throes of an internal crisis produced in part by the actions of the Nawab against some notables in the administration, prominent among them being the state banker, the Jagat Seths and high ranking officials like Mir Jafar and merchant chiefs Omi Chand and Khwaja Wajid.

Historians have offered different explanations for the rift in the durbar. S. C. Hill (1905), for instance, saw in this an expression of an anti-Muslim bloc against a capricious and high handed Nawab; Brijen Gupta (1966) suggested that the growing proximity of merchants and bankers towards the English Company represented a changing social balance that came in the wake of growing European trade and the coalition of mutual interests it created. Subsequently Philip Caulkins argued that it was the cracks in the older circle of consensus that had been put in place by Siraj's predecessors that were responsible for the growing rift between the Nawab and his ruling class and that the latter saw in the emerging situation an opportunity for reclaiming their influence in court. Rajat Ray, in an article on the Mughal ruling class (1985), expanded this argument to suggest that the disaffected courtiers opted for the intervention of the Company as mercenaries to settle

an internal issue and they had no idea about the consequences of their action. Sushil Chaudhuri took a different line and ascribed to the Company and its servants a more direct and interventionist role in producing the Plassey conspiracy. He argued that the sub-imperialism of the Company servants lay at the root of the crisis and that it was 'the private trade interest of the company servants (that) was the motive force behind the British conquest of Bengal'. The anxiety of the private traders stemmed out of declining trends in their commerce in the 1740s because of growing competition from the Dutch and the French. Consequently, the attacks on their settlements in Hugli and Chandernagore were a dress rehearsal for the final showdown in Plassey.

Each of the arguments is partly valid and that the combination of private trade interests and the pressures of Anglo-French rivalry persuaded the Company to take the offensive is evident. Equally significant is the fact that the durbar was divided and driven by its own notion of interests and showed its willingness to sign an accord with the Company to overturn the Nawab without realising that their actions would backfire on them with serious consequences. Siraj, on his part, appeared to have realised the enormity of the crisis as the British expeditionary force under Robert Clive and Admiral Watson recaptured Calcutta and sacked Hugli (February 1757) as an act of reprisal. This attack also had the ostensible effect of display and of convincing the disaffected party about the superiority of the English force and of sending out a warning to the Nawab and his intrigues with the French. The timing was perfect as the Nawab was anxious about a possible Afghan attack and agreed to a negotiated settlement. However, the conciliation came too late—a confident Clive chose to stage a coup d'etat along with the disgruntled faction in Murshidabad. Events moved quickly—acts of perfidy and forgery were followed by the decision to replace Siraj-ud-daulah with Mir Jafar, his commander-in-chief and who was the banker Jagat Seth's favourite.

The battle that followed at Plassey was a farce. A substantial section of the army simply kept away from action. Siraj was defeated, captured and put to death. Mir Jafar was installed as Nawab and even before the conspirators knew it, all real power began to slip

away to the Company. This was not what the conspiring faction had anticipated—it was now simply a matter of time before the Company would subvert the existing political edifice by their relentless demand for financial gain. The battle of Plassey thus marked the beginning of empire that a trading company had audaciously, if not self-consciously, embarked upon.

What followed was a reign of plunder and pillage—immediately after the war, the English army and navy received the hefty sum of 275,000 pounds for distribution among their members. Apart from that, in the following years, the Company received 22.5 million rupees from Mir Jafar and Clive acquired a personal jagir worth 34,567 pounds. More significantly the post-Plassey scenario completely transformed the trading prospects of European private traders and company servants who enjoyed virtually unlimited freedom to flout all conventions, buy cheap, sell dear and corner commodities. Plassey thus opened the gates for unlimited private gain and personal fortunes through extortion as well as through rampant abuses of the dastak that once more became the issue of contention between successive Bengal nawabs and the Company. The latter had on its part acquired new privileges, like the right to strike rupees in their own mint, and in particular, the revenues of the Twenty Four Parganas extending to the south of Calcutta.

The development of Anglo-Nawabi relations between Plassey and the fall of Muhammed Reza Khan (1756–75) was primarily characterised by a growing and persistent demand for revenues and privileges, by a detachment of responsibility from power and by an ineffectual campaign on the part of the Bengal nawabs to invoke older notions of ethical governance. On its part, the Company was interested in escalating revenue demands on the nawabs while its private traders were keen on breaking down all shackles that fettered their private operations until the authorities from England insisted on a measure of regulation. Consequently, the successors of Mir Jafar—Miran and Mir Qasim—struggled to fight free of English interference at all levels, and in the case of the latter, there was an open confrontation. Mir Qasim, who had been installed on the masnad in 1760 in place of Mir Jafar, had started off as a favourite as he had displayed sagacity and efficiency in making good revenue

payments to the Company and also ceding to it the territories of Burdwan, Chittagong and Midnapore, but soon found it impossible to work with the English.

Intent on building his separate sphere of influence, Mir Qasim shifted his capital to Munger in 1763 and eliminated all potential dissenters of his regime. He endeavoured to build and modernise a proper army and to finance it, substantially increased the tax burden. The Company viewed these developments with some apprehension but the real bone of contention remained the abuse of dastaks and the rapacity of English merchants who wished to control the lucrative trades in salt, saltpeter, opium and tobacco. In order to put an end to these abuses, Mir Qasim decided, in October 1762, to intercept British shipping and subject British trade to payment of uniform duties. When this met with resistance, he abolished all duties and created a uniform playing field for all traders—Indians and Europeans alike. The English retaliated by replacing him with the old Mir Jafar once more and both sides got ready for a second round of confrontation.

In December 1763, Mir Qasim left Bengal and tried to build an alliance against the Company consisting primarily of the Nawab of Awadh and the Mughal emperor Shah Alam II. The alliance was built on shaky grounds—Shuja-ud-daula of Awadh agreed to the alliance only after he was promised Bihar and its treasury along with a payment of Rs 30 million at the successful completion of the mission. The alliance did not prove to be especially useful as the combined armies were routed at the Battle of Buxar (1764). This was a more substantive battle than Plassey as it demonstrated the superiority of European forces, their organisation and command over the Indian army. The coalition army suffered from a complete lack of cohesion that the British were able to exploit. Some Mughal contingents were ready to desert. Beni Bahadur, the prime minister of Awadh, played a double game and it was not surprising that the battle should have gone against the allies. But even more significant was the outcome of the battle that brought in substantive changes in the political set up and in the political stature of the Company. Overnight a trading company became owners of a realm with revenue collecting rights. By the Treaty of Allahabad (1765) that

followed, the Mughal Emperor granted the Company the *diwani* (revenue collecting rights) of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa and allowed them to maintain a British Resident in the Murshidabad court. The revenue collecting rights ensured the Company a financial base that would help it in its future projects of growth and political expansion. The treaty also brought Awadh into the newly emerging political relations in a big way—under the subsidiary treaty, Awadh was obliged to pay Rs 5 million to the Company and undertake to defend the Company's territories and also allow a British Resident in Lucknow and duty free trade rights to the Company. In one fell stroke, the Company had acquired a huge revenue-yielding tract and a firm foot-hold in the Bengal political structure—the *nizamat*—and had also brought Awadh into its sphere of influence. The British Resident now became the nucleus of power and his interference thwarted the residual authority of the *naib nazim* (deputy officer). Reza Khan became naib nazim and attempted for a while to restore a degree of responsible government but failed miserably, leaving the province to face the onslaught of accelerated revenue demands, the disastrous famine of 1771, and a complete destruction of the old regime.

Nizamat

Office of general administration and criminal justice

Soon after the Treaty of Allahabad, Clive returned as Governor to Calcutta. The Nawab Mir Jafar retained the title of Naib Nazim, which included defense, maintenance of law and justice. After his death soon thereafter, the Company conferred the nizamat to a *naib suba* of its choice and through its Resident at Murshidabad began to exercise de factor power. In 1766, the troops of the Nawab and his cavalry were demobilised; even as the British army was augmented—the number of sepoys grew progressively and military expenditure accounted for at least 44 per cent of its budget.

Naib Suba

An officer appointed by the Nawab of Bengal who presided over the criminal jurisdiction. He sat as judge in important cases.

In the period of diarchy that followed the battle of Buxar, the British enjoyed power without responsibility. This was a consequence of the dual system of government devised by Clive. Under this system, the servants of the Company did not undertake duties as diwan or nazim in their own person; instead they held the deputy naib or

nawab responsible for the same. The puppet nawab had no authority while the supervisory control enjoyed by Company servants made the situation worse. Muhammed Reza Khan was appointed naib diwan in 1765 and was expected in that capacity to administer the diwani. At the same time, he was also naib nazim of the suba, which gave him in theory unlimited power but in fact he was constrained at every step by the undue interference of the Company. The result was extreme pressure on the population that was subject to increasing revenue exactions, which coincided with drought conditions leading to the dreaded Bengal famine of 1770, leading to some serious concerns in England. This set the stage for a new administrative set up that aimed at direct control.

Naib Diwan and Niab Nazim

Deputy officers in charge of revenue and civil administration

What characterised Company policy in Bengal until this stage was the deployment of a rhetoric of free and fair trade to gain undue advantage in the existing political set up, and the forcible imposition of a subsidiary British army the upkeep of which was transferred to the subordinate ally and thereafter using the latter's inability to maintain the force as an excuse for further infiltration. This was especially so in the Company's policy towards Awadh, which became an important field of operations for private trade and thereby exposed to the political ambitions of private traders. Alongside, there was an attempt to augment taxes almost indiscriminately, a measure which had disastrous consequences.

Around the same time as the fateful guns were fired at Plassey, the Company establishments in Madras and Bombay were developing their local spheres of interests. In the case of the peninsula, the local manifestations of Anglo-French rivalry were an important factor in the expansionist policy of the Company. In western India where Company influence was severely circumscribed by the presence of the Marathas and by financial constraints, the Company authorities preferred to project the cause of free and fair trade and win over local merchant support to assume some control over the Mughal administration in Surat. In 1759, the policy yielded partial dividends as the Company assumed the position of the *quiladar* in Surat city and along with it the imperial admiralty. This gave them some local power and influence, especially the right to mediate in local

disputes involving succession of the nawab and other officials in the administration as well as in superceding the power of rival European trading companies.

The Anglo-French Rivalry in the Peninsula

As mentioned before, the Anglo-French rivalry played itself out in southern India from as early as the war of Austrian succession in 1740. The French, although late-comers to colonial enterprise in the east had built up a substantial base in southern India, thanks largely to the enterprise of some of its leaders, notably Dupleix. The centre of French power was Pondicherry, founded in 1674 and developed by Dupleix, the French Governor from 1740. It was Dupleix who contemplated political expansion in a big way by interfering in local disputes and acquiring territory. The Carnatic in the eighteenth century provided a convenient site for such politics as authority was shared between its Nawab Dost Ali and the Nizam of Hyderabad who was its de facto sovereign. The fragmented nature of political authority meant that succession disputes were extremely fraught and provided a good opportunity for rival claimants to fish in troubled waters. In 1740, the French staged an attack on Madras and this signaled the beginning of the Carnatic wars when the English appealed to the Nawab of the Carnatic for assistance. The Nawab sent a force against the French but it proved ineffectual. However, the French position at this stage suffered a major reverse because of divided command and major differences between Dupleix and his commander La Bourdounnais. Madras was given up to the English but as soon as this was done, Dupleix staged a second attack on the city only to give it up on the conclusion of the Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle (1748).

The second act in the drama unfolded almost immediately thereafter, when succession disputes in Hyderabad and the Carnatic once more came to the fore. The claimants for Hyderabad were Mir Ahmad Ali Khan (Nasir Jang) and Hidayat Muhi-ud-din Sa'adu'llah Khan (Muzaffar Jang), while those for the Carnatic were Chanda Sahib and Nawab Anwar-ud-din of Arcot. The French allied

with Chanda Sahib and Muzaffar Jang but faced pressure from the English who opted for the rival clique. As it turned out, the French candidates emerged triumphant and granted substantial concessions to the French Company in the form of a jagir in the Northern Circars (which consisted of a narrow slip of territory lying along the western side of the Bay of Bengal from 15° 40′ to 20° 17′ north latitude, in the present-day Indian states of Andhra Pradesh and Orissa) Masulipatam and some villages around Pondicherry. The English viewed these advances with increasing trepidation and sent a force under Clive to initiate the Second Carnatic War. This time the English emerged victorious—Clive's occupation of Arcot was followed by the release of Muhammad Ali, who was now placed on the throne of the Carnatic. Dupleix's recall did not help matters for the French who had to be content with their territories around Pondicherry and Karikal, important posts in the Carnatic, and the Northern Circars.

The outbreak of the Seven Years War (1756–63) in Europe between England and France was once more followed by the resumption of hostilities between the two companies in India. Financial difficulties had weakened the French Company and even the arrival of the energetic Count de Lally did not turn the tide in their favour. Post after post fell and the fall of the Northern Circars and the settlements of Masulipatam and Yanam ended French influence in the region. The English fleet emerged victorious and by August 1758 had overrun nearly all the French settlements. The most decisive war was fought in January 1760—the battle of Wandiwash—and in May, the French capitulated. The campaigns were largely financed by the Nawab of the Carnatic—here too, the English Company put pressure on its local allies to finance armed campaigns. The following year saw the decimation of virtually all the French settlements including Mahe and Jinji.

Why did the French fail where the English succeeded? In part, this was due to the defects in command that combined with the temperament of Bussy and Lally. Also the efficiency and superiority of the English forces proved to be decisive and their access to secure finances and reinforcements helped. By the Peace of Paris concluded in 1763, France got back all the factories and settlements that it

possessed in India prior to 1749 but were expressly forbidden from fortifying any settlement except Chandernagore. The balance of power had decisively changed in favour of the English, which was now the de facto power in the Carnatic. The Nawab was tied to the English Company in a relationship of financial and military dependency, losing real political authority and waiting for the inevitable dispossession that came in 1810.

The French factor continued to be important in south Indian politics especially in the context of Mysore and its challenge to British power. In fact the growing presence of the French in the form of mercenary soldiers and supervisors in eighteenth century states seems to have worried the English Company, which frequently invoked the French peril in justifying their course of action. In the case of Mysore, the threat would appear to have assumed more substantive dimensions as its ruler Tipu Sultan entertained notions of a French partnership against the English Company at the height of the Revolutionary wars in Europe. Relations with the rising power of Mysore were thus bound to be tense given its ruler's anti-British stance.

Mysore's Resistance

The early expansion of Mysore under Haidar Ali threatened the growth and commercial prospects of Madras and it was only a matter of time before the two would come to a collision. Haidar Ali's conquests along the Canara coast and further inland meant that very soon after he assumed authority, his kingdom stretched from the Krishna river in the north to Malabar in the west. The limits of this kingdom covered substantial parts of present-day Karnataka, parts of Malabar and parts of Tamil Nadu, thereby proving to be a deterrent to the Company's location in Madras. Mysore's expansion sent tremors of anxiety through both the state of Hyderabad as well as the Company establishment in Madras, setting the stage for an alliance between the two against Mysore. Haidar outmaneuvered the Company by contracting an alliance with the Marathas and took the offensive by attacking Arcot in 1767. The fight continued well over

a year and the British suffered heavy losses. A treaty was hurriedly concluded on 4 April 1769 ending the first Anglo-Mysore War and both parties agreed to a mutual restitution of territories. This marked a truce as both parties were aware of the irreconcilability of interests. Mysore's control over the pepper-yielding Malabar region left the Company and its officers restive. At the same time, the open espousal of French power by Mysore made prospects of a more enduring truce virtually impossible. In 1780, when the English planned an attack on Mahe situated on the west coast, Haidar intercepted the English and built up a diplomatic offensive as well by arranging a joint front with the Nizam and the Marathas. In July 1780, Haidar Ali invaded the Carnatic with at least 80,000 men and 100 guns, and sweeping all resistance before him, devastated the countryside. With his son Tipu Sultan, he annihilated Colonel William Bailley's force near Kanchipuram in September 1780 and stormed Arcot in October. British diplomatic successes at this stage did not deter Haidar who continued the war. Governor Warren Hastings was able to break Haidar's alliance and even depute forces under Sir Eyre Coote. The latter defeated Haidar in three strategically inconclusive battles (Porto Novo, 1 July 1781; Pollilore, September 1781 and Solingar, 27 October 1781) More inconclusive engagements followed until Haidar was able to inflict a crushing defeat on the British troops under Colonel Braithwaite. His death on 7 December 1782 halted the momentum as both sides now pressed for peace. The Treaty of Mangalore was signed on 11 March 1784 and provided for mutual exchange of war prisoners and restitution of territories.

The Treaty of Mangalore did not guarantee a lasting peace. It was little more than an uneasy truce waiting to be set aside. The pro-French policies of Tipu Sultan and his ambitions to strengthen the state by an aggressive mercantilist policy could not but stoke the apprehensions of the Company and the private traders who looked for the slightest pretext to initiate a fresh round of conflict. Tipu himself precipitated this by his diplomatic and commercial offensives. This, combined with the utter irreconcilability of Anglo-Mysore interests, set the stage for another round of conflict.

We have had occasion to comment on the mercantilist profile of the Mysore state as it attempted to centralise and streamline its

administration and augment its revenue base. Like his father, Tipu Sultan kept up relentless pressure on his neighbours—the Nizam and the kingdoms in Malabar, a region that the Company had special interests in. His attack on the Company's trade interests in southern India was an explicit expression of his intent. In 1785 he declared an embargo on the export of pepper, sandal and cardamom through the ports in his kingdom and three years thereafter, explicitly forbade any commercial transactions with English traders. This was a direct affront to both private traders as well as to Company officers, who saw in Mysore a real threat and challenge, which had to be countered without delay. This set the stage for the third and fourth Mysore wars fought under the governorships of Lord Cornwallis and Lord Wellesley respectively.

The immediate cause of the Third Mysore War was Tipu's attack on the kingdom of Travancore, a British ally in Malabar. The British got into their act immediately and forged a more stable alliance with the Nizam of Hyderabad and the Marathas against Tipu, and followed this up by a surprise nocturnal attack on his capital city Seringapatam (6 February 1792) under Lord Cornwallis. Tipu now had to sue for peace and the Treaty of Seringapatam was concluded on 23 February 1792. The terms were harsh and resulted in the surrender of nearly half the territory of Mysore to the victors. Tipu agreed to pay a war indemnity and release the prisoners of war and even agreed to deliver two of his sons as hostages to guarantee his adherence to the agreement. The Company acquired the territories of Baramahal, Dindigul and Salem, a portion of Malabar including Calicut and Cannanore. The treaty clearly signalled a new political balance in southern India and altered it in favour of the Company. It was but a matter of time before the truncated state of Mysore would be permanently disabled.

The final act in the drama came six years later. It coincided with the arrival of Lord Wellesley who entertained outright imperialist ambitions at a time when the French menace in Europe had assumed serious proportions. Tipu's secret negotiations with the French came under the scanner

Anglo-Mysore Wars
First Anglo-Mysore War (1766–1769)
Second Anglo-Mysore War (1780–1784)
Third Anglo-Mysore War (1782–1792)
Fourth Anglo-Mysore War (1799)

and gave the new Governor-General a pretext to overrun Mysore for the fourth and final time. In 1799, the capital city fell to the British forces and Tipu died defending it. Mysore came under the expanded system of Subsidiary Alliance that Wellesley had devised as a strategy for political control. In fact the end of Mysore's independence also initiated a new phase in the Company's political strategy—from Residents and direct annexation to a system of Subsidiary Alliances. Under this system, it became impossible for the dependent state to enter into any relationship with any other power. It also obliged the dependent allies to maintain a contingent of the Company's army and provide for its maintenance from the state treasury.

After the death of Tipu Sultan, Mysore was divided into three parts: the former Hindu dynasty was re-established in the central region, the heart of the kingdom until 1761, but this reconstituted Mysore was a vassal state of the Company. The coastal territories of Canara were directly annexed by the Company, which directly occupied the southern districts situated around Coimbatore. The territories in the north east were ceded to the Nizam of Hyderabad. These arrangements were, however, short-lived as almost immediately under the new system of Subsidiary Alliances, Hyderabad was divested of its initial gains and the Company resumed control over the territories that did not form part of the newly reconstituted state of Mysore.

The Subsidiary Alliance System: Inception and Operation

Wellesley's tenure as Governor-General (1797–1805) is generally seen as a major and formative period in the expansion of the Company Bahadur. An explicit and self-confessed imperialist, his aim was to see the Company as a paramount power that would subdue the weak Indian state system. His tenure coincided with the gradual decay of Maratha power, which was barely in a position to offer any kind of resistance and with the pretensions of scattered and dispersed French warlords that enabled him to articulate an anti-French stance in his pronouncements. He expanded the subsidiary treaty system,

The Nizams of Hyderabad

Qamar-ud-din Khan, Asaf Jah I (1720–48)
Mir Ahmed Ali Khan Siddiqi, Nizam-ud-Dowlah Nasir Jang (1748–50)
Nawab Hidayat Mohi-ud-din Sa'adu'llah Khan Bahadur, Muzaffar Jang (1750–51)
Nawab Syed Mohammed Khan Siddiqi, Amir ul Mulk, Salabat Jang (1751–62)
Nawab Mir Nizam Ali Khan Siddiqi Bahadur, Nizam ul Mulk, Asaf Jah II (1762–1803)
Nawab Mir Akbar Ali Khan Sikandar Jah Siddiqi, Asaf Jah III (1803–29)
Nawab Mir Farkhonda Ali Khan Siddiqi Nasir-ud-Daulah, Asaf Jah IV (1829–57)

which had always been an important strategy that the Company had adopted in its dealings with Indian princes. This involved helping a native ally by agreeing to lend troops, which had to be funded by the ally. The second stage involved escalating pecuniary demands to maintain the expanding force under English officers. The Company at the same time also declared that it would make available to the ally a fixed number of troops in return for a fixed sum of money to the Company. The final stage of the Subsidiary Alliance was one undertaken by Wellesley—a logical step and useful for the company to strengthen its political authority over the native provinces. According to this policy, the Company undertook to defend the territories of their Indian allies. Towards this end, they placed a subsidiary force in the territory of the state concerned, the upkeep of which the states had to undertake, not by paying money directly but by surrendering territory from which the necessary revenues could be collected. According to the Company's calculations, the revenues collected would meet the expenses of the subsidiary forces. The treaty with the Nizam in 1800 marked the final stage in the evolution of the Subsidiary Alliance system. The system worked in such a way that most of the native states surrendered their political authority to the English East India Company.

It would seem that the policy of Subsidiary Alliance was initially conceived of by the French in India. Dupleix had introduced the policy of lending European troops in return for a fixed amount of money. The English thereafter adopted and expanded the system. The special achievement of Wellesley lay in the fact that he developed and elaborated the policy and applied it to almost every Indian state in the latter decades of the eighteenth century.

As we have noted, a typical subsidiary treaty imposed financial obligations on the dependent state, which was obliged to maintain a fixed contingent of troops, to maintain a resident in court and to surrender its independence in foreign policy. This Company resident was entrusted to look after the maintenance of the army and administration of the native states. The states were denied the power to employ any Europeans in their service without the prior permission of the Company. The Company had absolute authority to control the administrative policies and interfere in the internal affairs of the state.

As early as 1765, we know that states like Awadh had been drawn into the dragnet of imperial expansion through the medium of the Subsidiary Alliance system. Awadh became, from very early on, a key region—it was here that the Company experimented with indirect rule, carried out through its resident and designed to manipulate the state and exploit resources for its own gain. Awadh was also seen as a bulwark against possible Maratha intrusions into the newly conquered areas of Bengal. Consequently, the Treaty of Allahabad had imposed on the Nawab a military obligation to maintain a subsidiary force at his expense. This expanded Company influence in the region, as the resident began to exert undue interference in the state's administration. Central to the Awadh story was the interplay of economic and political factors, the convergence of commercial and political interests. Rudrangshu Mukherjee (1982), analysing the complex web of commercial interests, questioned the assumption put forward by Peter Marshall (1975) that the 'political frontier'

Subsidiary Alliance

The Subsidiary Alliance was put into effect by Lord Wellesley (1798–1805) although its basic principles had been formulated earlier by powers such as the French in southern India. According to the principles of this alliance system, any Indian ruler accepting the alliance was to maintain British forces within his territory and make the necessary financial arrangements for its upkeep. This could assume the form of territorial cessions as well. The ruler had also to maintain a British resident in his court whose intervention in foreign policy issues had to be accommodated. In short, the native ruler lost a considerable part of his autonomy. The Nizam of Hyderabad was the first to enter into this alliance, Tipu Sultan rejected it summarily, while Baji Rao II, the Maratha leader entered into it (Treaty of Bassein 1802) in a futile attempt to regain control over his warring chiefs.

sustained by revenue collection and subsidies, moved well ahead of their true 'economic frontier' of trade and investment. Essentially the debate raised issues of the primacy of economic factors in the articulation of a political programme of expansion. Marshall in a subsequent rejoinder held that it was not possible to make an over confident case for the links between economic penetration and political annexation (1985).

Moving up the Gangetic Valley: The Case of Awadh

Awadh, with its sprawling boundaries, held the crucial Jamuna frontier and the gateway to the fertile Gangetic Doab. As early as 1764, the value of using the state as a buffer against Maratha incursions into Bengal was evident and found reflection in the agreement of 1765. According to the new arrangements under this treaty, Shuja-ud-daulah, the Nawab of Awadh (1753–75), maintained his sovereignty on payment of an indemnity. However, the entente was ephemeral, for as soon as the Nawab showed signs of independence and resolution, the Company clamped on him a new treaty in 1768 that limited the army of Awadh to 30,000. Other articles of the treaty granted English merchants the right to engage in trade with Awadh and to enjoy substantial custom privileges. Both these provisions brought the state into the vice-like grip of the Company. On one hand the pressure of maintaining contingents of the Company army created conditions of instability and alienated landed groups from the Nawab making it impossible

Nawab Wazirs of Awadh
Burhanul-Mulk Nawab Sadat Khan 1132–51 AH / 1719–37 AD
Nawab Safdarjung 1151–66 AH / 1737–53 AD
Nawab Shuja-ud-daula 1166–88 AH / 1753–75 AD
Nawab Asaf-ud-daula 1188–1212 AH / 1775–97 AD
Nawab Wazir Ali Khan 1212 AH / 1797–98 AD
Nawab Sadat Ali Khan 1212–29 AH / 1798–1814 AD
Nawab Ghazi-ud-din Haider 1229–34 AH / 1814–19 AD
Birjis Qadra 1273–74 AH / 1857–58 AD

Kings of Awadh
Ghazi-ud-din Haider 1234–43 AH / 1819–27 AD
Nasir-ud-din Haider 1243–53 AH / 1827–37 AD
Muhammad Ali Shah 1253–58 AH / 1837–42 AD
Amjad Ali Shah 1258–63 AH / 1842–47 AD
Wajid Ali Shah 1263–72 AH / 1847–56 AD (1829–57)

for him to govern. On the other hand, the abuse of commercial privileges and the rampant expansion of European trade meant that the subordination of the state to the Company's will was but a matter of time. Peter Marshall, while acknowledging the penetration of European economic interests into the region, argued that the idea of an actual annexation was linked to the problems of maladministration, incompetence and failure to pay the subsidy. However, such a political argument overlooks, as Rudrangshu Mukherjee has argued, the fact that the regular payment of the subsidy could only be ensured by the annexation of the territories whose revenues were equal to the subsidy and that the inability of the political system was a consequence of Company pressure in the first place.

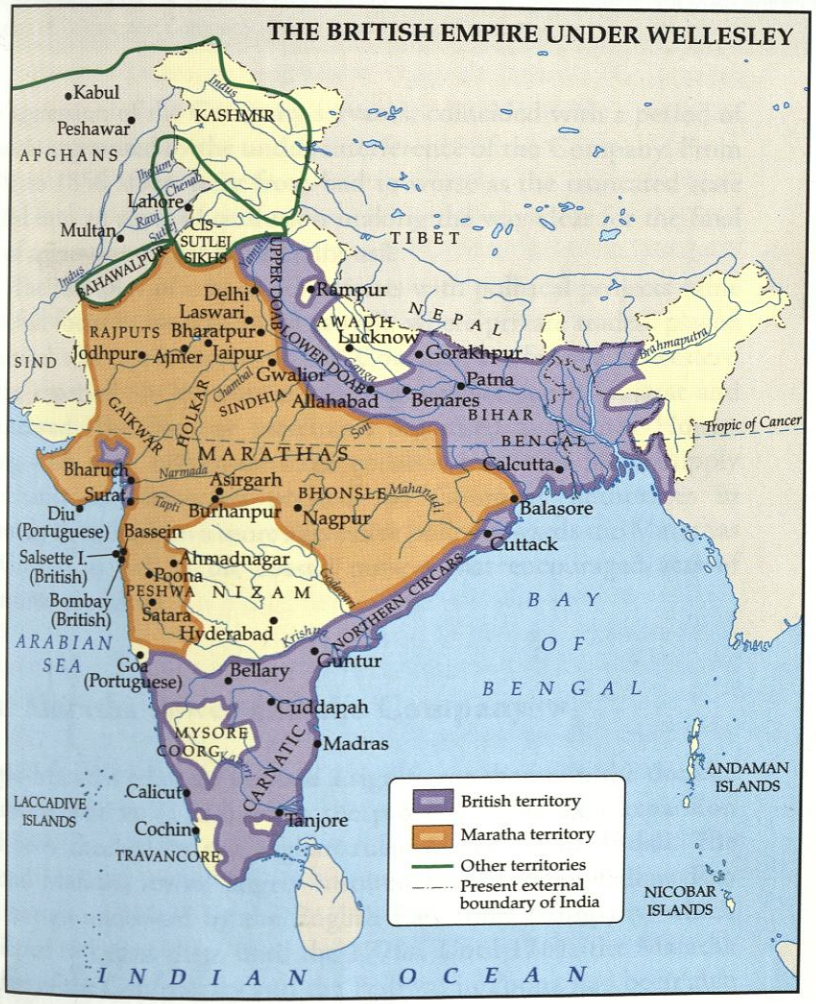
In the 1770s, the Company became more and more involved in Awadh as the number of its troops in the pay of the *wazir* increased and as ever larger subsidies were demanded of him. To ensure regular payment the resident in Lucknow began to intervene—assignments of territory were made over to the British and for a while even placed under British military collectors. To make up the deficiency of Asaf-ud-daula's administration (1775–97), the Company insisted on appointing ministers of their choice to oversee it. By the 1780s, it was clear that Company inroads into Awadh had reached a point where they undermined the wazir's government altogether and the outright annexation of his state became inevitable. Both Cornwallis and John Shore preferred to avert the issue by opting for a policy of non-intervention and it remained for Lord Wellesley to take the offensive. As an outright imperialist, Lord Wellesley had no qualms in advocating a policy of annexation using both the French presence in Northern India as an excuse and also to highlight the incompetence of the Nawab's government as a

primary cause. In 1800 he managed to get Nawab Sadat Ali Khan (1798–1804) to agree to an even greater reduction of his forces with a corresponding increase in the Company's troops in Awadh. In 1801, he confronted him with another preposterous demand that he hand over the whole of Awadh or make huge territorial concessions to the company. Eventually under such pressure, Sadat Ali agreed to sign away districts from Gorakhpur to Rohilkhand. As Jadunath Sarkar observed, 'The keynote of Wellesley's Indian policy was the destruction of the French state now formed on the banks of the Jamna, as he called Perron's viceroyalty of northern India, nominally under the sovereignty of the Sindhia. His first step was to create a belt of British territory on the western flank of Oudh, so as to intercept any Maratha invasion from Sindhia's part of Hindusthan and also to enable British forces to penetrate into Perron's French kingdom without delay. By a treaty forced upon Nawab Sadat Ali Khan (on 10 November 1801), he secured for occupation and administration by the British the nine districts of Rohilkhand, Mainpuri, Ettawah, Cawnpore, Allahabad, Azamgarh, Basti, Gorakhpur and Farukhabad.'

The economic context in which these acts of aggression were committed was significant. Documenting the growing presence of British economic interests, Mukherjee argued that by the later decades of the eighteenth century, the province had been inundated by European traders and their *gomastas*. Important circuits of internal trade had developed linking the cross-country traffic in cotton, textiles and sugar with Bengal. A string of intermediary towns had come up—Kanpur, Kalpi, Mirzapore, all testifying to the growing British private trade. In 1804, the English commercial resident at Ettawah wrote that the trade in the Doab and in Rohilkhand was in the hands of the Europeans. In fact even more significant than the preponderance of Europeans in Awadh's trade was the nature of the traffic—increasing exports of raw cotton from Awadh indicated that the province was feeding into a typical colonial trade situation serving the priorities of colonial trade and the metropolitan economy. The rampant increase of private trade,

Gomasta

The term designated an agent, a personal assistant, secretary to a high ranking official, in this particular context the English East India Company.



Agency Houses

Agency Houses were an important commercial formation in the late eighteenth and nineteenth century in India. British merchants and free traders organised themselves into agency houses, attracted deposits from Company servants and retired personnel and invested the same in a variety of commercial operations. Among the more important ones, were the houses of Palmer and Company, Bruce Fawcett and Company.

the aggression of the Company servants, coincided with a period of misrule aggravated by the undue interference of the Company. From 1801 to 1856 affairs went from bad to worse as the truncated state lapsed into an abyss of confusion making the way clear for the final act of aggression under Lord Dalhousie.

The interplay of economic interests with political projects came into full focus in western India as well, where private traders played a critical role in championing the Company's offensive in western India, especially in the cotton growing areas of south Gujarat and Kathiawad. The Bombay merchants organised as Agency Houses along with their influential Parsi collaborators, and bania supply merchants and financiers pressed the Company authorities in Bombay to embark on a more aggressive policy towards the Marathas in Gujarat as well as the coastal powers that encouraged acts of maritime predation.

The Maratha Power and the Company

Anglo-Maratha relations became a significant theme in the decades following Panipat (1761) when the process of Maratha expansion had been checked by the Afghan ruler Ahmad Shah Abdali. The second Maratha revival largely inspired by the able Madhav Rao did not go unnoticed by the English East India Company, which preferred to bypass them until the 1770s. Until 1761, the Maratha sardars of the Confederacy and the Peshwas in Poona had been able to control substantial territories in northern and central India as well as exercise rights to revenues in the Deccan. This had been achieved by a judicious combination of political and local adjustments. Researches have demonstrated that the consolidation of Maratha rule

was followed by an increase in agricultural production in some areas like Malwa and that it was based on the support and cooperation of local landed groups. Stewart Gordon, for instance, has demonstrated how Malwa moved from an area of sporadic tribute to a paying, prosperous province. Throughout the 1750s, the revenue in Malwa and Khandesh was moved up to the levels of the best of Mughal times. Trade flowed through this region as new towns came up just as new social groups came into prominence in the new set up. The Company was more than aware of the strength and all-India dimensions of the Maratha presence as it sought to insulate its position in eastern India by finding buffer regions like Awadh and imposing subsidiary obligations on states like Hyderabad. The defeat faced by the Marathas in the fields of Panipat changed the situation.

The decade after Panipat saw the Marathas attempt to retrieve their fallen power and prestige by recovering revenue areas and rebuilding their military strength. Two themes became dominant in the decades after 1770, first the shifting power relations between the centre and the Maratha states (Sindhia, Holkar, Bhonsle, Gaekwad) and secondly the assertion of English political interests that were fanned by the outbreak of internal dissensions within the Maratha polity.

The second Maratha revival under the young Peshwa Madhav Rao was able for a while to withstand the disaffected factions in the court in Poona. Prominent in fomenting disaffection was the Peshwa's uncle Raghunath Rao, whose intrigues and ambitions destabilised internal affairs. These were taken advantage of by other Maratha sardars as well as by the Nizam of Hyderabad. Factional conflicts as well as the post-Panipat confusion had repercussions on the confederacy—in most cases, succession-related disputes put pressure on the local administration. In Rajasthan for example, the authority of the Holkar was dislodged and even when their power was partially reasserted, the arrangements were confined to the payment of a fixed sum as tribute. In the area around Delhi, between the Ganges and the Jamuna and south as far as the Malwa plateau, local landed lineages and residual Muslim powers fought incessantly and there was little that Maratha presence could do to thwart Jat and Rohilla demands. The only major Maratha initiative

was that of Raghunath Rao, whose campaign in the 1760s was largely inconclusive. By 1769, however, Maratha influence was restored in the region and through 1770, under the leadership of Mahadji Sindhia, Maratha control remained intact.

The gradual growth of the Company's political ascendancy in the Gangetic plain as well in the peninsula brought them directly in collusion with the Marathas. By the 1770s, the Company authorities in Bombay, through the Bombay Council, put forward their political ambitions as well, and staked its bid for more substantive control along the coast. Their ambitions were whetted by the factionalism in the Maratha camp especially after the demise of Madhav Rao (1772) and the ascendancy of his uncle Raghunath Rao. Madhav Rao had been unable to iron out the intrigues before his death with the result that the confederate chiefs immediately seized the opportunity of staking their claims and forming their coalitions. In August 1773, the ball was set rolling by Raghunath Rao who instigated the assassination of Narayan Rao, the brother of Madhav Rao. This did not endear him to the lobby that was in power and he had to leave Poona in 1774. It was at this juncture that the East India Company authorities in Bombay intervened to make a series of diplomatic gaffes. The Bombay Council, without obtaining the permission of the supreme government in Calcutta signed the Treaty of Surat in March 1775, by virtue of which it undertook to provide 2,500 soldiers, including 700 Europeans to Raghunath Rao in exchange for the island of Salsette and the port of Bassein to the north of Bombay.

The Supreme Council in Fort William did not take kindly to this act of insubordination and Warren Hastings, the Governor, denounced it as 'impolitic, dangerous, devoid of legal base and unjust'. The other members went further and decided to revoke the treaty and made arrangements for a return of the status quo. Consequently, in March 1776 the Treaty of Purandar was concluded by which the British, while retaining Salsette, agreed not to support Raghunath Rao. This did not go unchallenged either. This time around, it was the Company directors in London who denounced the agreement and put forward a more forward policy of annexation and expansion. Using the French factor as a pretext, they urged Hastings to adopt a more proactive policy.

The political context in which these sudden shifts of policy decision occurred was partly constituted by the growth of French influence in the Maratha camp and partly by the growing political influence of the Bombay merchants. The arrival of French mercenaries in India in the eighteenth century was an important development, as some of them became extremely successful in raising efficient armed units. De Boigne (1751–1830) was an example. Entering the service of the Sindhia in Gwalior, he raised a powerful force that the English viewed with some apprehension. This coincided with the growing trade of the Bombay merchants in cotton that had to be secured from South Gujarat and Kathiawar, which was under the control of Maratha officers. At the same time, their coastal traffic was threatened by pirate attacks which had to be countered. Thus, the growing requirements of the Bombay merchants for greater security of coastal shipping and for greater control over the cotton-yielding tracts in south Gujarat meant that a subset of imperial interests developed from within the Bombay mercantile community and converged over time with the imperialist aspirations of Lord Wellesley.

The first Anglo-Maratha war did not produce any decisive results and belied Hastings' expectations. In January 1779, the British signed a convention at Wadgaon, which caused them to lose the meagre advantages that they had gained so far. The English generals Goddard and Popham initially scored a few sensational successes, seizing Allahabad, Bassein and even Gwalior the capital of Sindhia, but Goddard's advance towards Poona was soon checked. In 1782, hostilities were concluded by the Treaty of Salbai. Orchestrated primarily by the senior leader of the Confederacy, Mahadji Sindhia, the Treaty of Salbai restored the status quo, barring the occupation of Bassein by the English Company. Raghunath Rao relinquished his claim to the title of Peshwa. The treaty also committed the Marathas and the British to collaboration against Mysore and its ruler Haidar Ali.

Post-Salbai Maratha politics was largely dominated by the towering presence of Mahadji Sindhia, who focused his attention on north Indian affairs despite the lack of cooperation from other associates of the Confederacy. In fact, Tukoji Holkar of Indore did

everything he could to undermine Sindhia's influence while the Peshwa's prime minister Nana Fadnis tried relentlessly to plot his fall. Sindhia deployed the service of De Boigne to improve his armed forces and under the latter's command was able to inflict losses on Holkar in the battle of Lakheri (1 June 1793). These victories did not solve the basic problems within the Confederacy and it was apparent soon after the death of Sindhia (1794) that the fractious relations between the various sardars would render the Maratha power vulnerable to the growing power of the English Company.

With the deaths of Sindhia and the Peshwa (Madhav Rao) a complex domestic situation emerged—the successor of Mahadji Sindhia was Daulat Rao Sindhia who succeeded in overpowering the new Peshwa, but found himself outwitted by the widows of Mahadji. Also around this time, De Boigne departed and was replaced by the weak and capricious Perron who could do little to protect his master against the meteoric rise of Jaswant Rao Holkar, who crowned himself sovereign of Indore in June 1799. His actions precipitated serious conditions of civil war, offering the Company an excellent opportunity of intervening in the internal affairs of their most serious rival. After several successes, Holkar's forces suffered defeat in front of Indore at the hands of Sindhia's generals (14 October 1801) Abandoning open warfare, he resorted to guerilla tactics, moving with great rapidity from one place to another. In May 1802, he embarked on an invasion of the Deccan, where the decisive battle took place near Poona on 25 October 1802; the joint forces of Sindhia and the Peshwa were vanquished.

It was at this critical juncture that Wellesley planned his moves against the Marathas, the major obstacle standing in the way of British dominion. He used the threat of the establishment of a French state on the banks of the Jamuna to convince the authorities in London about the necessity for decisive action. This was to be expressed in the form of a Subsidiary Alliance system. He thus intensified the pressure on the Nawab of Awadh who had to accept the demobilisation of his forces in February 1800 and an increase in British military staff in his territory. In November 1801 he was forced to cede the richest region, Rohilkhand and a part of the Doab (that bordered Maratha territories) to the Company.

Hereafter, Wellesley took on the Marathas as conditions seemed perfect for a major initiative. Thus, when the new Peshwa Baji Rao II approached the Company for protection, Wellesley offered him the treaty of Bassein wherein he was instated as Peshwa but under the protection of the Company.

The second Maratha war broke out in 1803 with only the Sindhia and the Raja of Berar confronting the Company. The war took place in multiple theatres and on two fronts; in the Deccan where the forces of the Sindhia were defeated at Assaye by Arthur Wellesley, and in north India where the bulk of Sindhia's forces commanded by Perron confronted the sepoys of Lord Lake. The latter inflicted a severe defeat on Perron's forces at Koil on 29 August 1803 and captured the powerful fortifications of Aligarh on 4 September which led to the capitulation of Perron. On 11 September, Lake defeated the lieutenant of Perron and on 16 September, Mughal Emperor Shah Alam accepted British protection in Delhi. The Sindhia's moment of glory as regent had passed.

The final clash took place at Laswari, where the army created by de Boigne was thoroughly routed. This was a decisive battle: the two chiefs, Sindhia and Bhonsle, had to capitulate to Wellesley's terms. Both chiefs had to accept English residents in their capitals and ceded large territories to the Company. It acquired Orissa, Delhi and Agra as well as Gujarat and a part of the Deccan. The rich cotton-yielding tracts in south Gujarat, Broach in particular had been under the control of the Sindhia and the Bombay Government, in response to the pressure exerted by the Bombay merchants, opted for these acquisitions. With Delhi coming under Company protection, it was clear that the Company Bahadur had been fully articulated. Holkar, however, remained undefeated but this did not make Wellesley's victory any less important. By the time he left, there was hardly any doubt that the extent of Company rule had been vastly expanded and that numerous Indian states had been obligated to accept subsidiary treaties of alliance. The final act of capitulation came in 1818 when the Peshwa and Holkar were decisively defeated and the very position of Peshwaship was eliminated.

Anglo Maratha Wars

First Anglo-Maratha war (1775–1802)
Second Anglo-Maratha war (1803–1805)
Third Anglo-Maratha War (1817–1818)

The dismantling of the Maratha Confederacy in 1818 was linked in an important way with the problem of containing the Pindaris in central India. A peripatetic tribe of marauders, they had stepped up raids against the Company territories in central India. The Company, in an attempt to contain the menace, demanded the cooperation of the Maratha princes, Sindhia and Holkar, and forced the Peshwa to sign yet another treaty (June 1817). The Peshwa signed the treaty but promptly went back on commitments by exploiting some of the difficulties faced by the English and even staged an act against the English residence in Poona. The action produced serious reprisals as the Company was able to inflict major defeats on Holkar and the Peshwa and also mop up the Pindari operations effectively. The arch rival of the Company had thus been set aside—Maratha power was replaced by a ring of small, truncated states controlled through Subsidiary Alliances and oriented to a new sense of loyalty to the imperial dispensation. This was useful given that loyal princes could buffer the Company against local discontent. The continuation of princely rulers like the Nizam and the Maratha princes also helped the British veil their power behind that of more traditional ceremonial and ritual display. The only state that remained elusive as yet was the Punjab and it would take another statesman of gumption and sagacity to finish the final round of conquest.

The Final Onslaught: The Sikh Wars

The creation of the Sikh state of the Punjab by Ranjit Singh, the chief of the Sukerchakia misl had been viewed with mixed feelings by the Company, which was by and large reluctant to confront the Sikh ruler. It preferred to work through an indirect alliance with him thereby using his cooperation to act as a buffer against a possible French threat via Persia and Afghanistan. In 1808, a small crisis developed when a number of principalities situated on the southern side of the Sutlej river approached the Company for protection against Ranjit Singh, leading to the Treaty of Amritsar in 1809. The treaty recognised the protectorate of the British in the area and fixed

the Sutlej as the frontier between the Punjab and British India for more than thirty years. This left Ranjit Singh free to develop his ambitions beyond the Sutlej; he occupied Jammu in 1812, Attock in 1813, Multan in 1818 and then Kashmir in 1819.

Ranjit Singh's death in 1839 changed the situation. Two things converged to produce a major crisis and a new political decision. One was the eruption of an internal crisis within the Punjab state. The other was a development extraneous to the Punjab but one that had important repercussions on British policy towards the state. This was the fear of a Russian advance towards India via Afghanistan that triggered off a series of British misadventures in the region and that led to the growing intrusion of Company power in the Punjab.

Ranjit Singh's death was followed by serious succession disputes as competing claimants tried to mobilise support from local notables. Sher Singh, the son of Kharak Singh was supported by the Dogra faction while Maharani Chand Kaur, the widow of Kharak Singh was upheld by other notable chieftains. Both factions appealed to the Company for intervention and ultimately Sher Singh became king through a conspiracy hatched by the Dogras whose leader was the all-powerful Wazir Raja Dhian Singh. The situation did not stabilise as more conspiracies followed, leading to the accession of Dalip Singh, Ranjit Singh's youngest son. Around the same time, the Khalsa army became a powerful presence in Punjab politics. It was this development, the rise of the Khalsa army that demanded a greater share of revenues from various political claimants in the region, that prompted the Company to take more serious consideration of the situation. The inevitability of a showdown convinced the Governor-General Lord Hardinge to press for a showdown. Thus, when Jawahir Singh, wazir and the uncle of Dalip Singh, was executed by the army in 1845, Lord Hardinge declared war on the state of Lahore in December 1845.

The conflict that followed was bloody as the Sikhs were formidable adversaries. Their army was composed of 70,000 regular troops in addition to 40,000 irregular ones. They displayed great courage in combat and it was only treason and the betrayal of some chiefs that made the task of the English easy. Partial victories in 1845 and 1846 saw the English in control. The first war ended with the

Treaty of Lahore (March 1846) and resulted in English annexation of the Jallandhar Doab and a partial incorporation of the Punjab into British India. Kashmir was attached to Jammu to form a semi-independent state under Raja Gulab Singh as a reward for his allegiance to the Company. A supplementary treaty in December removed Maharani Jindan (Dalip Singh's mother) from her position as regent and gave the British Resident at Lahore extensive powers. The resident who was chosen for this task was Henry Lawrence who was given charge of maintaining the administration and ensuring regular payment of the indemnity. This marked the beginning of Punjab's loss of independence.

The final subjugation of the state coincided with the arrival of a new Governor-General as well as with a new moment in the notion of empire. Between the departure of Wellesley and the coming of Lord Dalhousie, a sea change had occurred in the attitude of the Company State in India. It was no longer enough to conquer and rationalise the possessions of the Company into a cohesive political and territorial entity—it was now essential to unify British sovereignty in India territorially and legally. What this meant on the ground was that the Company could no longer avoid a clearer articulation of its political status and that residual and nested sovereignties could no longer exist—all these had to be brought under a clear and unambiguous political regime based on the idea of unified sovereignty including a monopoly of military force. Tied to this authoritarian notion of a new and modern state was the conviction that Britain had the moral right to rule India. Dalhousie exemplified this mood as he embarked upon the second Anglo-Sikh war, (1848–49) which brought about the annexation of the rich province of the Punjab and extended the frontiers of the Company Raj into the Khyber. The immediate cause of the Anglo-Sikh war was the rebellion of two Sikh governors, Diwan Mul Raj of Multan and Sardar Chattar Singh Atariwala and his son Raja Sher Singh of Haripur. Initially the Sikhs seemed to have the upper hand; in the battles of Ramnagar (November 1848) and Chillianwala (January 1849), the British suffered reverses. But soon after the rebels were overpowered and on 29 March 1849, Maharaja Dalip Singh signed the doctrine of annexation and Punjab became a province of the

Doctrine of Lapse

The Doctrine of Lapse was an annexation policy devised by Lord Dalhousie (1848–56). According to this policy, any princely state or territory directly under the influence of the English East India Company, as a vassal state under the subsidiary system would be annexed if the ruler did not have natural heirs to the throne. According to the principle of the Doctrine, the sovereignty of a native state lapsed to the paramount power in default of natural heirs in a ruling family. The working of the principle was not easy for Hindu custom encouraged childless rulers to adopt sons. Dalhousie claimed that in such cases, sovereignty could not pass to an adopted son without the consent of the governor-general. Dalhousie also distinguished between states which had been independent before the British regime and those set up by the British themselves. Using this doctrine, the Company annexed the states of Satara, Nagpur, Jhansi and Awadh.

English East India Company. The Lawrence brothers were placed in charge of managing the province, and succeeded very quickly in equipping it with an efficient administration and an extensive canal irrigation system.

The conquest of the Punjab was followed by the annexation of Lower Burma thus giving the final touches to a huge empire that stretched from the Khyber to Mandalay. Its territorial sweep was matched by a more vigorous push towards eliminating residual princely sovereignty in the subcontinent. By advocating what is known as the Doctrine of Lapse, Dalhousie bypassed the existing conventions of adopting heirs to succession and in the process, secured states in central India, Bengal, Rajasthan and the Punjab. The doctrine was essentially an annexation policy according to which, any princely state or territory under the direct influence of the English East India Company would automatically be annexed if the ruler was incompetent or died without a natural heir. By this injunction, several states—Satara, Jaipur, Sambhalpur and Nagpur and finally Awadh were annexed. The doctrine was also used to end subsidies. Dalhousie's final act was the annexation of Awadh in 1856 on grounds of mismanagement and inefficiency.

Thus by 1857, when the Governor-General left for England, the Company Raj appeared unshakeable, firm and extensive. It had a huge territory under its control, it had annexed 63 per cent of the territories of the subcontinent and brought under its authority 78 per cent of the population. The rest remained under the

control of Indian princes whose loyalty would be put to test in the conflagration of 1857. Over these territories and subject peoples, the Company had articulated a clear ideal of unified sovereignty and upheld the notion of a modern state. This by any account was a major feat especially for a trading company that had started out as a corporation of merchants seeking profits through trade. Admittedly by this time, the Company was no longer a monopoly trading body. It had lost its monopoly rights by a series of charter acts and it had been brought under the regulatory supervision of Parliament as early as the closing decades of the eighteenth century. The Company too on its part was no longer simply a commercial body as it rapidly and increasingly assumed a new incarnation primarily as a tax machine, a revenue-extracting apparatus, the maintenance of which saw the formation and creation of a new structure of rule.

One final question remains to be answered. What was it that enabled the Company to carve out the Indian dominion? Was it an act of deliberation? Was it an accident? Was it the inevitable consequence of early successful industrialisation that brought India and England together in an asymmetric embrace? According to P. J. Marshall, the Company's success was the result of Mughal decline and unprecedented expansion of British force calculated to protect Company forces against the French. This in turn enabled the Company to extract concessions from the local powers. 'The British did not deliberately destroy the fabric of Indian states, but in the confused circumstances attending Mughal decline "their repeated demands backed by force had precisely that effect"'. The demands themselves were the outcome of commercial considerations and while the link between commercial and political expansion is not always easy to discern in every situation, there is very little doubt that sub-imperialism did provide the main impetus to Company expansion and that the Company's mercantilist imperatives continued to be significant. As Eric Stokes (1973) argued, the Company's purpose remained mercantilist, to wring a surplus from the Indian revenue sufficient to purchase its annual investment of Indian goods. It was possible for the Company to exert pressure to achieve these ends as it drew on a superior force and capacity to mobilise resources.

Its ability to persuade indigenous bankers to support their project proved extremely significant. If soldiers were better paid and fed and persuaded to fight for the Company Bahadur, bankers were more assured of the Company's ability to repay their debts from the surplus of the diwani.

This was evident at all the three major stages of conquest. In the first phase of expansion between 1757 and 1765 when the Company acquired its control over Bengal, the Jagat Seths emerged as principal allies while in the second phase between 1786 and 1805, when Company rule made valuable gains in western, central and southern India, the support of the Benaras banking house and that of the Gujarat banker Tarwady Arjunji Nathji proved invaluable. In the third phase between 1838 and the Mutiny that witnessed expansion in Sind, Punjab, Kashmir and Awadh, bankers were solidly behind the Company as it took on the problems of law and order. In all three stages, the Company adopted and deployed different rhetorical strategies: from advocating the cause of free and fair trade to that of mal-administration and unified sovereignty.

Whether or not the Indian experience conformed to an older pattern of British imperialism has remained a subject of debate. Robinson and Gallagher's path-breaking study on imperialism and free trade rejected the traditional view that the nineteenth century was a period of retrenchment and argued that the British continued to expand on account of various considerations, strategic, economic and ideological. Economic considerations remained very substantial and even if Britain did not opt for direct conquest, the decision to maintain influence was not jettisoned. On the other hand D. K. Fieldhouse argued that there was continuity in British imperial policy from the eighteenth century, but that economic motives were not the sole consideration. The impetus for expansion, he argued, came primarily from the existing frontiers of empire, not from the machinations of metropolitan interests.

Like its Mughal predecessors, the new empire worked through a patrimonial bureaucracy—through its covenanted civil servants recruited by the Company in England on the principle of merit, although patronage did play a part. Indians were excluded from all responsible positions and with the exception of the soldiery that was

recruited from within local society, the Raj remained disconnected from its subjects. On the other hand, the Raj was able especially under Dalhousie to introduce a modern network of communication that integrated the country, permitting greater mobility which affected the quotidian life of ruler and ruled. We shall have occasion to refer to the workings of the Raj as we shall explore in detail the revenue systems underpinning its regime and the social and legal programmes it embarked upon as a corollary to its self assumed civilising mission.

In tracking the process of conquest that brought into being the British Raj, we come across a number of distinguishing features. The first is the interplay of commercial interests of the company servants with its limited political design of making claims related to extra territorial privileges and custom payment exemptions. In the first stages of conquest, the principal issues were related to the protection of commercial privileges. After the acquisition of the diwani, however, things changed as the Company increasingly became interested in land revenue and territorial control and in sovereign power. At each stage in the articulation of the Raj, different combinations of ideology, pragmatism and possibility converged to produce specific policy decisions. The Company while fully cognisant of its superior military and organisational structure was not always predisposed to abandoning its Asiatic face as it often relied on older notions of ceremonial display and sources of legitimacy. Nor did the Indian states resist possibilities of change and adoption of new techniques. The balance however, tilted in favour of the English Company especially after its control over the rich resources of Bengal and the Gangetic Doab and the coming of the first industrial revolution at home.

Finally there was the question of military strategy and organisation. The empire was ultimately won by arms and even though a number of the so called wars of the eighteenth century were to do with shifting alliances, small short displays of attacks and retreat and surrender, equally there were important contests that tried the limits of the Company. The Company adopted a variety of tactics depending on the situation. In some cases, the Company reduced the size and effectiveness of the armies under the control

of the local ruler by transferring military power from state armies to subsidiary forces paid for by the state in question. There was also the question of mobilising a successful army of sepoys to fight their wars and to maintain real contact with the subject population. Here the success of the Bengal army was especially significant as it not only enabled the British to fight its wars but also to construct a bridge between the Company and Indian society. According to Seema Alavi (1995), it was the Company's military power that held the key to its political dominance, which was predicated not only on superior fighting skills but also on effective recruitment strategies. These depended for the most part on high status peasants until the first quarter of the nineteenth century, when the Company began to invent its model of the Gurkha soldier. Recruitment drives also produced new ethnographies of the subject population as the colonial state developed a well-defined balance of different social types that could be used to good effect in the army. As Alavi writes, 'H. Hearsey, a military official recruiting men from the Nepal war, argued that it was important for the army to maintain a balance because the Pathans are "good for attack", Mewatis for "agility and defending posts", "Crooked stalked matchlockmen" for convoy and regular duties, and the sepoy, by which he meant the Company's peasant soldier, is noted above all for his "discipline and covering a retreat"'. Thereafter, pacification and consolidation would introduce even sharper categories of subjects that would thereafter be harnessed for the workings of the colonial regime.

More recently we have the writings of R. G. S. Cooper (2005) who argues that the reasons for the success of the British are not to be easily located in their superior strategy. The technology and strategy they deployed were on many occasions inferior rather than superior and the fact was that the Marathas lost rather than the British winning the conflict. He also contests conventional assumptions about the lack of discipline and drill among native armies and makes the point that there never was a watershed when Europeans held a quantum leap in military knowledge that distanced them from all of India. What the British benefited from was the decline of the Mughal Empire which aggravated local rivalries, making it easy for the Company to step in. Additionally,

according to Cooper, they held three key advantages over Mysore and the Marathas. First their civil administration was integrated with the military administration and this generated important fiscal and logistical benefits. Secondly, they were able to offer relatively benevolent terms to conquered soldiers and peasants, thereby sustaining and even expanding the military labour economy. Thirdly, the Company benefited from Britain's global profile and could always rely on huge assets that Britian possessed and could use to bail the Company out if the occasion so demanded.

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Chapter 3

Consolidation and Governance: The Apparatus of the Company Raj

The material edifice of the Company Raj was the outcome of a long process of evolution and experimentation. The transition from a trading body to a sovereign authority was not an easy one to adjust to as successive governor-generals in India and directors abroad came to realise. Thus, regulation of Company affairs by the British Parliament assumed importance soon after the acquisition of the diwani even though there was no political will at this stage to impose direct control over the Company's affairs in India. However, even as the Company made the move from commerce to political sovereignty and adopted measures to defend, govern and exploit the vast empire, it had to recast its own status, standing and structure in the subcontinent. Alongside, it had to consider an ideology to rule and to know its subject peoples and on that basis devise a comprehensive system of revenue and civil administration and of law, order and social management. We will begin with the changes in the status and structure of the Company and its relations with the Parliament at home.

Parliament and the Company Raj

Even from its inception, the Company as maritime trading company dedicated to the pursuit of profit had to depend on the successive governments in London for various matters. Patronage

was an important factor and the Company was considered as an important element in city politics. Divisions within the Company often corresponded to political alignments within the Parliament and it was only to be expected that a change as profound as the Plassey Revolution would complicate relations between Company and State. There were two aspects to this: one, the acquisition of territory and revenue (Plassey and Buxar) followed by dominion generated a sense of incredulous awe. As Huw Bowen writes, 'one pamphleteer told the directors and stockholders during the late 1760's, they had been suddenly transported from your house in Leadenhall Street and shops abroad to the dominion of the richest empire in the world and left, as if by dream in that amazing pitch of exultation'. On the other hand, reports of greed and rapacity, corruption and excesses of private trade interests raised the ethical issue of whether it was appropriate for the government of a people and territory to be vested in a commercial organisation. This became a pressing issue especially as the complicity of the Company in creating a famine situation in Bengal in the 1770's came to light and there was a genuine debate whether or not the acquisition of empire had been financially justified. As the directors themselves observed in 1768, the 'Company had only exchanged a certain profit in commerce for a precarious one in revenue'. Moral concerns dovetailed into new economic ideas especially those that were formulated by Adam Smith (*An Enquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*). For Smith, companies claiming and enjoying monopolies were an aberration and had to be countered.

It was in the context of expanding private trade and breakdown of conventions in the internal trading economy of Bengal that regulation was first attempted. This initially assumed the form of control over private trade ventures and their attempted monopolies followed by the Company agreeing to pay 400,000 pounds annually to the government. Subsequently, there was a more concerted attack on the duty free trade privileges enjoyed by Company servants and a more severe indictment of the excesses of the East Indian Nabobs. Feelings ran high with Edmund Burke in 1772 taking the cudgels up for intervention. He argued that it was the paramount duty

of Parliament to superintend the affairs of the Company and that charges of corruption and venality could not be ignored. The need of the hour was governance and a structural improvement in the Company's administrative set up.

A select committee of the Parliament was instituted in April 1772 to inquire into the state of affairs in the aftermath of Company expansion. What had to be immediately addressed was the nature of the relationship between Company and State, the modalities of control that the Company in London could exercise over its agents in India and whether a single source of power could be devised for an extensive empire that had recently been secured. At this stage, Parliament adopted a compromise—without scrapping the Company's monopoly, it accepted in principle the idea of control over the management of Indian affairs.

How to control the administration was the next step. The issue had some relevance in India as well given the contested nature of Company authority. The Bengal Council did not command undisputed obedience from its subordinate councils in Madras and Bombay with the result that a unity of policy or intent was not always forthcoming. A beginning was made in 1773 in the form of the Regulating Act of Lord North. The Act formally recognised parliamentary control over Indian affairs. The Court of Directors of the Company would henceforth, be obliged to submit all communications received from Bengal about the civil, military and revenue matters in India to the British government. Additionally, the Act proposed some changes in the structure of the Company's command in India—the position of the Bengal Government was raised to that of the Governor-General who was to be assisted by a council of four members. The Governor-General was in charge of all the districts which in 1773 comprised of Bengal, Awadh and the Carnatic. The Supreme Council in Bengal had the power to superintend and control the presidencies of Madras and Bombay in matters of war and peace, except in situations of emergency. The Governor-General and his Council were under the control of the Court of Directors, whom they were meant to keep informed The Act also made arrangements for a Supreme Court to be established in Calcutta while the legislative powers were vested

in the Governor-General and Council. British judges were to be sent to India to administer the legal system and it was hoped that the rudiments of an administrative system would be assembled effectively.

The Act was not especially effective—in the long run it failed to streamline Indian administration, although in Britain, it was able to end stock splitting. Problems of communication, however, between London and Calcutta and between Calcutta and the other presidency towns made effective and united action difficult. Alongside there was the problem of disaffection within the Council that enabled provincial councils to take full advantage and to maneuver for their interests. This was evident during the first Anglo-Maratha war when decisions taken by the Bombay Council were summarily set aside by the Calcutta Council and then those taken by the latter were undermined wilfully by disgruntled subordinates. Consequently, an amending Act came to be passed in 1781 but even this did not clear the ambiguities of jurisdiction.

In 1784, the Pitt's India Act was passed to resolve some of the issues of jurisdiction. It did not interfere with the Company's territorial possessions but it did make an attempt to bring public affairs and Company administration in India under more direct control. It transferred the greater part of the power of decision from the Court of Directors to the Board of Control that functioned under the authority of the Crown. The Board would consist of six members including one of the secretaries of state, the Chancellor of the Exchequer and four privy councilors. It was authorised to 'superintend, direct and control all acts, operations and concerns' related to the 'civil or military government or revenues of the British territorial possessions in the east Indies'. The orders of the Board were binding on the Court of Directors, which was required to dispatch all correspondence to the Board for its scrutiny. The Court of Directors retained its control over commerce and patronage, but needed the approval of the Crown in appointing its principal servants in India, such as the Governor-General, governors and the Commander-in-Chief. The government of India was placed under the Governor-General and

a Council of three, thus giving greater authority to the former. The presidencies of Bombay and Madras were subordinated to the authority of the Governor-General in Bengal. The Crown on the advice of the President of the Board of Control could recall all persons in the service of the Company, including the Governor-General. The new structure thus accommodated a clearer hierarchy of command and control.

Notwithstanding these provisions, the Act was not able to streamline the administration or define authority and responsibility with clarity. The fact that there were two masters—the Court of Directors and the Board of Control—meant that the Governor-General could if he so chose, to play one against the other. On the flip side, there was always the possibility that a fractious council could make any effective governance impossible and that it could override the decisions of the Governor-General. An amending Act of 1786 corrected these anomalies and gave the Governor-General the right to override is council in extraordinary circumstances. This enabled a greater measure of cohesive administrative power and the structure that emerged in its wake remained until 1858.

The Company and its Charter

The Company as we know began its career as a monopoly trading company that enjoyed the exclusive right to the India-Europe trade. By 1765, serious objections were beginning to be raised against the monopoly. The Company's charter became an object of much discussion and in fact changes proposed in it, reflected new shifts in the way the Company's mandate for rule was considered. The Charter Act of 1793 renewed the charter of the Company for twenty years giving it possession of all territories in India during the period. In internal administration, the Governor-General's power was extended and the subordinate councils of Bombay and Madras were brought more clearly under his command. A regular code of all regulations that could be used for the internal government of Bengal was framed and this was expected to have uniform application, to be applied to all rights, person and property of

The Acts of the Parliament

The English East India Company was founded on the basis of a charter. Its acquisition of substantial territories in India forced the British Crown to redefine its status and privileges. This found expression in two major acts, namely the Regulating Act of Lord North (1772) and Pitt's India Act (1784). In the following years, three Charter Acts were passed renewing the Company's charter but simultaneously circumscribing its privileges.

The Charter Act of 1813. This asserted the sovereignty of the British Crown over the Indian territories held by the Company whose charter was renewed for twenty years. The Company was, however, deprived of its India trade monopoly except for trade in tea and the trade with China. The Act required the Company to maintain separate and distinct commercial and territorial accounts.

The Charter Act of 1833. This put an end to the remaining trade monopolies of the Company and divested it of all commercial functions. It renewed the Company's political and administrative authority for another twenty years. It invested the Board of Control with full power and authority over the Company. It invested the Governor-General in Council with full power and authority to superintend and control the Presidency Governments in all civil and military matters. It provided that no Indian subject of the Company would be debarred from holding any office under the Company by reason of his religion, descent or colour.

The Charter Act of 1853 provided that British India would remain under the administration of the Company in trust for the Crown.

the Indian people. All laws were to be printed with appropriate translations in Indian languages so that the subject peoples could know their rights, privileges and exemptions. Thus, it became clear that the Company was serious about its business to rule and that this was to be ordered around the principle of civil law. The framing of such a regulation clearly indicated the directions that British rule would assume and how it was already being seen as an instrument of moral instruction designed to uplift the Indian people. These directions became even more articulate in course of the subsequent charters when missionaries and free traders were given a free hand in their agenda of moral and material improvement.

By 1812, the situation in England and India had substantially changed so far as the presence and importance of the private traders were concerned. As beneficiaries and agents of the first Industrial Revolution in Britain, British free traders chafed at the idea of restrictions to their enterprise and argued that if India was opened up, then an induction of capital, skills and techniques would

guarantee all round development. Their ideas struck the right chord with Benthamite reformers and Evangelicals who were able to prevail after Charles Grant was elected to the Court of Directors. In 1813, when the Company's charter came up for renewal, some of these concerns surfaced. The new act (1813) incorporated in a major way some of the suggestions. It renewed the Company's charter for twenty more years, it was allowed to retain its Indian possessions but at the same time it was obliged to accept the 'undoubted sovereignty of the Crown of the United Kingdom over the Indian territories'. The Company was also deprived of its monopoly of trade with India, although its monopoly of trade with China was untouched for another twenty years. Additionally and significantly, Christian missionaries were permitted to be allowed to enter India and undertake their proselytising mission. Not that they were especially successful in this.

The Charter Act of 1813 was undoubtedly an important landmark in the history of the Company state in India. It exposed India to an explicitly Westernising programme—a major shift from the older Orientalist policy that Warren Hastings as first Governor-General had embarked upon. This was to have major consequences as we shall have occasion to see. Twenty years thereafter when the Company's Charter once more came for renewal, there was widespread agitation in Britain about the desirability of upholding the Company's monopoly. The new act conclusively destroyed the Company's monopoly of tea trade with China and henceforth, it was only meant to have political functions. Here too the possessions were to be held under a form of trusteeship. The President of the Board of Control now became the Minister for Indian affairs, while the Board was allowed to superintend all administrative affairs in India. The Governor-General of Bengal became the Governor-General in India, who with his council controlled all civil, military and revenue matters in the whole of India. He was also empowered to legislate for the whole country and these laws were meant to apply to all persons—British and Indian. A law member was added to the council and a law commission set up to frame the laws. The Company's services—the un-covenanted ones—were thrown open to Indians.

An important feature of these protracted discussions about the Company charter was the unwillingness in England of jettisoning Company rule altogether. This was as true in the early years of rule, when the censure of individuals was never followed by an abolition of Company rule as it was later when charter after charter continued to invest in the Company the right to its India possessions. However, in 1833 when the Charter was renewed for the final time, the decision to limit its lease was significant. The Company was allowed to keep its possessions in trust for her Majesty until the time came for a complete transfer. The Act also provided for the separation of the executive and legislative functions of the Governor-General's Council by adding new members for purposes of legislation. It added a law member to the Governor-General's Council; Lord Macaulay became the first law member and responsible for the framing of the penal code. The Act also carried a clause to the effect that that the Governor-General was to spend every year out of the savings in the income of British India any amount up to a lakh of rupees for the revival and development of literature and encouragement of Indian scholars. Thus by this time, the Company's power was reduced to a fiction as it neither enjoyed commercial privileges nor autonomy being almost entirely subject to the House of Commons that could at any stage formally abolish its administration. That final Act came after the Mutiny of 1857 the aftermath of which saw the Government of India Act 1858 which formalised the transition from Company to Crown rule.

These were in brief the changes in the transformation of the Company's status that Crown intervention wrought between 1765 and 1858. What we need to understand is how these changes reflected in the ideology of empire and in the actual apparatus of government. How did the various shifts in Imperial attitudes find expression in actual administrative practice and governance and how did individual governor-generals execute their mandate? We shall look at some of these questions by surveying one, the changing ideology of rule, and two, by looking at actual policy and administrative arrangements relating to revenue, law and order that supported and serviced the Raj.

Ideology of Empire: The Orientalist Turn

An ideology of rule was an essential precondition to good and effective governance.

The possession of territory, revenue and sovereign power was not altogether an easy prize for the Company to absorb. As long as the Company and its servants were motivated by considerations of mercantile gain, it had been easy enough to deploy at random intervals the rhetoric of free and fair trade. This as we have seen, involved above all the exemption from paying onerous duties and the bypassing of existing local political authority, which was projected as despotic and capricious. As a popular saying went, in its early years all that the servants were interested in was 'a lakh and a lass a day'. Yet once the Company found itself in possession of an empire and had to frame its rationale within an ideology of sovereign rule, the exercise became more complicated. It was first of all necessary to justify rule by conquest and this could be done only through good governance that the British prided themselves on possessing.

It was in this context that the beginnings of an imperial ideology emerged and subsequently expanded in response to both internal pressures and extraneous considerations. Thus, British imperial ideology was a complex amalgamation of an imperial sensibility developing in Britain as well as of local considerations that forced British administrators to consider existing sources of legitimacy and constitutionalism.

As Thomas Metcalf has demonstrated, the British in India drew on a range of ideas that had shaped their view of themselves and also that had shaped their idea of India. As imperial Britons, the emphasis was on proper and civilised governance that was predicated on the idea of Rule of Law and on the security of property. The British saw themselves as a modern and civilised people and the best way of justifying their conquest of India was to become purveyors of good governance. But in applying these ideas to India, it was however, necessary to first of all understand India, its society and traditions and to determine how different or similar India was and how appropriate it was to apply these ideas in

Oriental Despotism

Oriental Despotism was a term used to describe a form of government characterised by despotism and tribute-collection, believed to be opposed to the rational Western forms of government.

practice. In this taxonomical exercise, one of the categories that emerged in the first half century of British rule in Bengal was Oriental Despotism, that carried with it the connotation that Asia had no idea of the principle of property, no laws and that Islam actually encouraged despotism. This was best exemplified in Alexander Dow's *History of Hindostan*. More recently, however, Robert Travers has argued that between 1757 and 1793, British officials in India made attempts to understand and recover India's political past to give some coherence and stability 'to their chaotic territorial government'. Of course it can be argued that much of this was to do with the paramount need to collect revenue, a precondition for which was the ability to don the well known garb of Mughal constitutionalism. Seen from this perspective, the decision of the Company to behave like an Indian ruler, to recognise the de jure authority of the Mughal Emperor, strike coins in his name, use Persian as the official language of communication and administer Hindu and Muslim laws in the courts was clearly part of an attempt to find an effective language of sovereignty and legitimacy. In a sense then the old language of restoring the ancient constitution was actually reworked to validate the Company's own imperial pretensions.

The Company's attempts to develop an ideology of rule found concrete expression first under the rule of Warren Hastings, when the Company stood forth as the diwan of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa. Apart from his genuine interest in Indian society and its inhabitants, Hastings elaborated a new view of the people, especially the Hindus, which not only altered the older perception of India but also gave the Company a particular handle in developing its ideology of rule. Hastings elaborated a view of the Hindus as a people who had been in possession of laws, which had remained unchanged since antiquity. For effective rule, it was necessary to retrieve these laws with the help of pundit collaborators. At one level, the discovery of these laws undercut the idea that India was a land subject to Oriental Despotism and yet the idea that these laws represented some fixed and enduring reality had profound consequences on

the structure of the Raj. What was remarkable about Hastings' tenure was an explicit bias towards orientalist scholarship that was informed by scholarly curiosity as well as pragmatic and utilitarian administrative considerations. A product of the Enlightenment ideal of understanding cultures, he saw the cultivation of language and science in India as a means to secure the gain of humanity. Such learning would at the same time be useful to the state as it would neutralise the resentment of the local inhabitants. In his words, 'Every accumulation of knowledge and especially such as is obtained by social communication with people over whom we exercise a dominion founded on the right of conquest is useful to the state ... it attracts and conciliates distant affections; it lessens the weight of the chain by which the natives are held in subjection and it imprints on the hearts of our countrymen the sense and obligation of benevolence'.

Hastings' project was endorsed within a larger intellectual circle in Bengal, especially the one that was associated with the Asiatic Society of Bengal. Founded by friends and associates of Hastings, like Gladwin, Halhed and Wilkins, the Society encouraged what has come to be known as Orientalist scholarship and involved the translation of Sanskrit and Persian texts and legal material. This was especially conducive to the ideological orientation of Hastings' administration that saw neither the need nor the desirability of importing English laws and customs and burdening the Indian people with them. He specifically enjoined that in 'all suits regarding the inhabitants, marriage, caste and other religious usages and institutions, the laws of the Koran with respect to Mahomedans and those of the Shaster with respect to Gentoo shall be invariably adhered to, on all such occasions, the Maulvies or Brahmins shall respectfully attend to expound the law and they shall sign the report and assist in passing the decree'.

The scholarship of Hastings and his era was informed by two assumptions, both of which would have far-reaching consequences for British conceptions of India. One was the belief that there was something which could be identified as the religion 'Hinduism' and the other, that a coherent religious system could actually be found in Sanskrit texts, which could be accessed with the help of Brahmin

collaborators. One important consequence of this assumption was the elevation of Brahmanical Hinduism and a fixing of bodies of knowledge, Hindu and Islamic, that were seen as the proper basis for due administration of justice. This was evident in the administrative reforms of Hastings and Cornwallis.

Thus by the end of the eighteenth century, British ideology of rule had been framed within an orientalist paradigm, one that produced reified categories of Hindu and Muslim law. Historians like Edward Said have argued that orientalism and the knowledge that it produced was in fact a graft from the top, a particular mode of representation that corresponded to the requirements of political power. In other words the project of knowing India, of discovering and describing India and its traditions was an exercise in discursive power. Subsequently, historians like Irschik and even Wagoner have argued that colonial knowledge was dialogic and that Indians participated in innovative and interesting ways in the production of colonial knowledge and that they were by no means entirely without agency in the endeavour. Polemics apart, we may choose to take a convenient middle path but it seems on the whole legitimate to suggest that in virtually all colonial projects that came to be, the dominant epistemic concerns inscribed themselves into the ethnography that followed. This is of course not to suggest that the new knowledge produced of Indian traditions was entirely and crudely instrumentalist to serve the needs of rule alone, but to make the point that there was interaction and also intervention.

Hastings policy was partly abandoned by Cornwallis even though the tide towards Anglicisation was not yet fully evident. What was obvious, however was that the new Governor-General had little sympathy for indigenous institutions or traditions and above all abhorred the personal and authoritarian nature of Asiatic rule. For him, the critical need of the day was to endorse notions of improvement, to curb venality and corruption and to safeguard ideas of personal property. This was revealed especially in the tenurial system that he introduced, where not only was the zamindar recast in the image of the improving English gentleman-farmer but the prescriptions for good honest civil servants became more rigid. This orientation did not disappear even when the Cornwallis system was subsequently

critiqued by the Romantics and a new set of compulsions reinforced notions of Indian difference. In a sense, whether it was under the Orientalist or Anglicist paradigm, the advocacy of Indian difference and of European paternalism was the order of the day.

Reform, Liberalism and Empire

A second phase in the articulation of Imperial ideology was the coming and convergence of the ideas of British free traders, Utilitarians and Evangelicals. The combination produced what we may loosely classify as liberalism, although this was by no means a coherent doctrine. Underpinning the new philosophy was the belief that human nature was fundamentally the same everywhere and that it could be transformed everywhere by the fruits of free trade, education and law. For the protagonists of this doctrine, India presented a valuable laboratory to attempt a liberal administration with a newly conceptualised scheme of education, the codification of laws and a new bureaucracy. The liberal view of Indian society was that India was ready and ripe for change. This was best embodied in the writings of James Mill who outlined necessary remedies for Indian backwardness. These took the form of light taxes and good laws. Equally important and influential was the work of Evangelicals in Britain who denounced Indian barbarism and spoke of the need to change the very nature of Hindustan. In India, their cause was strengthened after the Charter Act of 1813 which won them an Indian Church with a bishop and three archdeacons. The principal spokesperson for the Evangelicals was Charles Grant, who in the 1790s had argued that the only way to lift Indian society out of its degradation was to rid it of priestly domination, despotism and corruption. Education could prepare India for the knowledge of Christianity, which would also enhance material prosperity that would benefit British free trade as well. It was here that evangelical

Utilitarians

Utilitarians were advocates of the idea 'the greatest good for the greatest number of people'. The most celebrated spokesmen of the idea were Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill.

Evangelical

A protestant missionary sect especially interested in social reform.

and free trade ideas converged. For the free traders, India was a good market for British goods and a supplier of raw materials and this could be improved even further with education and free enterprise.

A precondition to this improvement was the principle of assimilation. India could no longer be different—India had to be anglicised if assimilation was to be achieved. This was in complete contrast to the older position held by the Company. The occasion of the Charter renewals paved the way for a shift in emphasis that was reflected in the advocacy of free trade and western education. In 1833, the Evangelist Charles Grant presided over the Charter Act that not only took away the Company's monopoly but also set in motion a new utilitarian project of educational and social reform. The liberal ideology of empire was to do with good laws, effective and efficient administration and the centrality of the Rule of Law. For these men, there was no question of venerating India's past but of preparing Indians via education for the future. It was an authoritarian liberalism that came to prevail, and one that over time became the basis for paternalism as well as racial distancing, even as talks about assimilation were widely vocalised. Not that racial distancing was a post-liberal phenomenon—racial anxieties had surfaced even earlier as Durba Ghosh's work demonstrates and which we shall have occasion to refer to later. The triumph of the liberal-evangelical-free trade lobby was a deciding moment in the articulation of social and administrative reform. The Education Minute of 1835, the drafting of the Indian Penal Code in the same year testified to a new orientation that gestured to a more explicit and confident celebration of the ruling class of colonisers and the culture and orientation they embodied.

The twists and turns in ideology were framed in the context of a very real material base. The Company was fully cognisant of the need to collect revenue efficiently and to ensure law and order that would make this possible. So from the very beginning, the shifts in imperial ideological concerns closely and intimately linked with the problems on the ground of collecting revenue. Each impacted on the other—the Company experimented with collection procedures and land settlements, justifying these with reference to ideological predilections.

Imperial Rule and Revenue Extraction

The acquisition of the diwani in 1765 brought the Company face to face with the real problem of revenue assessment and collection. As far as the Company was concerned, its immediate objective was to ensure revenue maximisation with the least administrative responsibility and to somehow balance the existing set up with its own authority. Under the old system, land revenue was the responsibility of zamindars and other intermediaries like *amils* and whose transactions were supported by an extended credit structure. There were revenue farmers as well who made a bid in the annual auctions. The Company did not wish to immediately transform the system, although in its drive to secure revenue, it invested European supervisors with the authority to oversee tax collections. Revenue assessments were enhanced—between 1765–66 and 1768–69, land revenue collection increased by 53.8 per cent. This put severe pressure on the zamindars, who became increasingly indebted to local creditors as well as European officers. As early as 1770, the supervisors became collectors whose inroads into the local economy wreaked complete havoc. This, combined with the disastrous famine of 1770 in which one third of the population was wiped off, forced the Company to seriously review the situation in terms of both its responsibility as well as the land revenue settlements that could be introduced.

The main causes of the famine of 1769–70 were the serious crop failures for two successive seasons, reduction of grain advances to peasants and the cornering of food supplies by the Company servants and their Indian agents. The results were disastrous as food prices spiraled and caused starvation deaths. In the words of W. W. Hunter who authored the *Annals of Rural Bengal* (1868), 'all through the stifling summer of 1770, the people went on dying. The husbandmen sold their capital, they sold their implements of culture, they devoured their seed grain, they sold their sons and daughters till at length no buyer of children could be found; they ate the leaves of trees and the grass of the field, and in June 1770 the Resident at the Durbar affirmed the living were feeding off the dead'.

It was in the aftermath of the famine, that the Company finally took the decision of standing forth as the dewan and of introducing a new system of revenue collection and management. It was left to Warren Hastings to initiate a new system in 1772, known as the farming system. European district collectors were entrusted with revenue administration while the actual revenue collection was farmed out to the highest bidders. This system failed to make any improvements in the situation as farmers tried to extract as much as possible without any heed to the condition of the producers. The escalating burden of revenue demand on the peasant created an unworkable situation, which Lord Cornwallis was asked to address immediately. Since the diwani, the British had had to grapple with the principles on which they could regulate and assess the collection of land revenue and with the notion of land tax being the most reliable source of revenue. But by the 1770s, this became a more urgent concern and began to be framed within conceptions of private property and the establishment of a permanent land tax. Company officials like Alexander Dow, Henry Patullo, Philip Francis and Thomas Law put forward the ideas of a permanent land tax and rule of property. The arrival of Cornwallis reinforced both these principles. For Cornwallis, the benefits of permanently limiting the state revenue demand, without which private property could not be effective or even put into operation, were many. As Eric Stokes observes, 'Only by limiting the land tax so as to leave a private rent could saleable property rights be established. Such was the chain of reasoning which occurred instinctively to the generation of Englishmen for whom Arthur Young had spoken, when he declared that the magic of property turned sand into gold'. Cornwallis was part of this generation and was more than convinced that once a land settlement was fixed in perpetuity, the Boards of Revenue and the Collectors would be deprived of all judicial and discretionary powers and their functions would be confined merely to the collection of statutory dues. Additionally, the guarantee of private property would introduce improvement and encourage all round growth and productivity.

The alchemy of private property and the stability that a class of improving landlords could guarantee were two principles behind the

Permanent Settlement of 1793. It had as its central belief that the foremost function of the government was to protect private property that would induce a large investment of capital; in Cornwallis' own words, 'landed property will acquire a value hitherto unknown in Hindostan, and the large capitals possessed by many of the natives in Calcutta, which are now employed in usury or monopolising salt and other necessaries of life will be appropriated to the more useful purposes of purchasing and improving lands'. Responding to these ideas, Cornwallis introduced the settlement wherein land ownership rights were vested with the prominent zamindars who had in any case been responsible for paying more than 53 per cent of the land revenue assessment in Bengal in 1790. Bengal, Bihar and Orissa became a part of a zamindari, and a zamindar had to pay the tax fixed upon his land. If he was able to discharge this obligation successfully, then he was a free proprietor who could own the estate, sell, and mortgage and transfer it. But failure to discharge the obligations meant his estate was liable to confiscation by the government and sale by auction. Under the settlement, zamindars were thus proprietors of the soil, their dues to the state fixed forever. The settlement brought under its ambit most lands that had been previously designated as rent free—in fact the increase in revenue through such resumptions between 1790 and 1870 was 48 per cent.

The social foundation of the new settlement was largely the old aristocracy of Bengal. The peasantry was completely excluded from the new settlement and in almost all cases bore the brunt of the settlement. Their customary rights were summarily set aside and they were reduced to being tenants. The enhanced level of revenue demand was borne by them with disastrous consequences. Subsequent regulations (1799, 1812) proved even more damaging as these gave zamindars the right to appropriate the property of tenants in cases of non fulfillment of rent obligations. Admittedly the richer strata of the peasantry was able to control influence and landed power at the village level, at least in some districts of Bengal, but this was by no means a pervasive phenomenon.

What were the consequences of the Permanent Settlement? Did the settlement enable the Company to achieve its objectives of both revenue maximisation and effective governance that involved

sensitive negotiation with local landed society? How did landed society respond to the settlement and what effects did it have on the social ecology of Bengal? Did the settlement produce the much-vaunted gentleman farmer? How far did the settlement create a major social transformation and to what extent did it facilitate the creation of a land market? We will answer some of these questions here; others especially relating to the economic implications of British settlements we will take up in greater detail later.

The most immediate effects of the settlement were the assurance of permanent land revenue. In the long run, this was not especially profitable as the share of the government in the total agricultural revenue tended to diminish. The land revenue demand, which was fixed at 90 per cent of the rental in 1793, declined by the end of the nineteenth century to 28 per cent. In Bengal proper, the percentage dwindled to 18.5 per cent by 1940. It is important to note that the Bengal model was only partially adopted in Orissa and Assam—it was felt that the freezing of revenue was not a viable option. Consequently in both provinces, revenue was increased from time to time.

The impact of the settlement in reshaping Bengal's landed society was not insignificant. Although the government had preferred to work with the traditional aristocracy, the obligations of revenue payment by a stipulated time and date (the 'sunset laws') affected many zamindars and the result was frequent sales that testified to a growing market in land. Between 1794 and 1807, land yielding about 41 per cent of the revenue in Bengal and Bihar was sold in auctions. In Orissa, between 1804 and 1808, 51.1 per cent of the original zamindars were wiped out. Evidently this pointed to the elimination of old magnates but this phenomenon cannot be exaggerated. Researches by scholars like Benoy Chaudhuri, Ratnalekha Ray and Sugata Bose have revised the old assumption that everywhere new men were making inroads into rural society. So although old zamindars in Bengal, Bihar and Orissa did suffer, it was also true that many of them survived the crisis and that processes of sub-infeudation helped many zamindars to retain their hold. Benoy Chaudhuri points out that in the case of the rise of new zamindari families in the early nineteenth century, the linkages with trade and capital accumulation proved critical. The Tagore family,

the Kandi family of Murshidabad, the Kashimbazar Nandi family, the Shovabazar family of Calcutta and the Palchaudhuri family of Ranaghat are instances in point, where fortunes from trade flowed into landed investment. There were also instances of mercantile and business families having connections with the zamindari and state bureaucracy buying land, a tendency that was stimulated by the commercial crises of the nineteenth century.

The processes of sub-infeudation were also important, enabling zamindari officers or *amla*s to parcel out old zamindaris among themselves. They were also considerable auction purchasers. Chaudhuri points out how in Orissa, out of 232 estates owned by Bengalis in 1817, 61.5 per cent belonged to the amlas. Their success was due to the fact that they were normally the first to know of the estates which were about to be sold and of their real worth. The peasants got little out of the settlement—in fact till about the mid-nineteenth century, their indebtedness appears to have increased, partly because of the cultivation of cash crops in the early years of British colonial rule. It was however, only in the 1870s that sales of peasant holdings to redeem debts became common and forced the government to pass a series of tenancy laws, which protected the tenants by recognising their occupancy rights. Whether the new laws provided genuine relief to the poor cultivators and or whether they only reinforced the strength of powerful rich peasants, the *jotedar*s, is a subject of debate. Rajat and Ratnalekha Ray argued that the class continued to exercise power and that there were broad continuities in the social structure of Bengal. Subsequent researches by Bose, Panda and Narazato have qualified this thesis and argued that the existence of a powerful jotedar class in parts of Bengal in the late nineteenth century was not irreconcilable with the coexistence of a zamindari class and nor did it necessarily imply that the Permanent Settlement of 1793 did not produce ruptures. For our own period, it seems fair to argue that the settlement did not reduce old owner-peasants to wretched tenants, but it did transform the relations between the two groups. The belief that the settlement would create a class of improving landlords was, however, belied. Zamindars relied on intermediaries to collect their rent while they themselves as a class of rentiers

moved into Calcutta to take advantage of colonial education and employment.

The application of the Permanent Settlement remained confined to Bengal. In fact, very soon after Cornwallis' departure, there was a shift away from the Cornwallis system. In Bengal, there was no immediate appreciable increase in the government incomes while in England, especially in official circles of the Company, there was a resurgence of utilitarian principles as well as a celebration of the idea of the folk, the original peoples, that was a fall out of the romantic movement. Both these sets of ideas appealed to the new British officers who came to India and assumed charge of various ceded territories and learned, like Thomas Munro for example, from their own experience, and considered new arrangements for rent collection and agricultural stability. As Burton Stein writes in his biography on Munro, he could be seen as 'a hinge connecting the long development of South Indian rural political and cultural institutions with the nineteenth century imperial era'.

What did the utilitarians represent? From the perspective of commonsense, the doctrine conveyed the idea that the moral worth of an action was determined solely by its usefulness and in generating happiness and pleasure. Advocated by Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill, the idea was to ensure by such appropriate actions the greatest good for the greatest number. On the ground this found expression in new ways of looking at creating a competitive society based on individual rights and of putting forward a new political economy. This drew its inspiration from the theory of rent propounded by David Ricardo and one that established two important points. One was that rent was a special form of wealth and was determined in a scientific manner. It originated from the propensity of population to outgrow food resources and the consequent necessity of resorting to poorer soils as society progressed. Rent constituted the differential advantage by all soils of a higher quality than the last taken up for cultivation. Except for the last, all other soils yielded rent or surplus and this could be scientifically determined by subtracting from the total or gross produce, the cost of wages and ordinary rate of profit on the capital employed. Social development had been historically such that the landlord enjoyed this surplus, which was for Ricardo

a monopoly value that arose because land as an instrument of production was limited in quantity, variable in quality and could be appropriated as private property. The course of economic progress had benefited the landlord at the expense of everyone else. Secondly, the surplus was to be appropriated by the state. For Mill in particular, the rent fund was the rightful property of the state. Admittedly this could hardly have been implemented in England but India provided a valuable opportunity for the idea to get tested. Here, Mill argued, private property had not developed in the Western sense of the term. It seemed therefore a good idea to put forward a system of assessment that did not fix the state demand in perpetuity, and one that bypassed the landlord or intermediary element that was parasitical in any case. From there, the blueprint for a *ryotwari* system was but a small leap of faith. Implicit in this arrangement of the State being the landlord and assuming the responsibility for fixing the individual assessment of the tenants, was a more interventionist agenda; for the state had to know the existing practices and arrangements more intimately. No longer could the state afford to take a neutral backseat, leaving the administration to intermediaries.

These ideas held a particular appeal and resonance with some of the officers who came around the time of Wellesley and under whom new territories were annexed and whose revenue administration became matters of recurrent concern. For the band of new men, like Holt Mckenzie, Thomas Munro, Thomas Metcalf and M. S. Elphinstone, who saw themselves as part of the Romantic generation, the mechanical principles informing the Cornwallis system were abhorrent and they wished to engage with India's history more directly and with greater empathy. This is not to suggest that these men disavowed the basic principles of the Cornwallis system, but merely to underscore the difference in the manner in which they wished to engage with Indian institutions. They also wrote and worked at a time when utilitarian ideas, especially those of David Ricardo, had decidedly begun to have an impact on official policy. All of them were convinced that the State had the legitimate right to a share in rent and that removing the unproductive intermediaries was critical. These ideas evolved in response to local circumstances as well and were developed in the course of their work in the districts.

In the settlements they envisaged, the peasant-cultivator was the valued link in the chain.

Having said that, the British in southern India, as elsewhere, encountered a bewildering variety of tenurial arrangements and intermediate groups and regional variations amidst which they needed land revenue. The immediate challenges were to consider viable rates of assessment, whom to settle with for land revenues and how to arbitrate between different land interests. The ryotwari system was intended to address all these issues and it is important to remember that it emerged through a process of trial and error, and was based on the incremental experience of various officials who held charge of different districts at different times. Also it needs to be kept in mind that after the Mysore wars, the region had suffered from an erosion of magnate power, making it difficult for the government to single out a dominant category, with whom they could settle the revenue. Before we try and trace the genesis of the ryotwari system as it was refined and operationalised by Thomas Munro, Governor of Madras (1820–27), let us take a quick look at the scene in south India in the closing decades of the eighteenth century.

Munro and the Ryotwari System in the Madras Presidency

The agrarian scene in south India was complex and was determined partly by ecology and partly by historical change. In the wet areas, the low land of the west coast and the great river deltas on the east, agrarian society was stratified with a heavy proportion of untouchability and restrictions on agricultural labour. It was also here that there was a concentration of temples and Brahmin settlements and *inam* lands that were either not taxed or very lightly taxed. In these areas, the village headman and village accountant were powerful and as Munro remarked in 1808, they 'were the only great body of landowners in India, for their lands are secured to them under every charge'. The accountants were Brahmins and Vellalas and represented the literate scribal group. One special

Inam Lands

Gifts of land or land revenue. These fell under different categories.

feature of the south Indian scene as Dharma Kumar writes, was the existence in some areas of a communal system of landholding in Brahmin settlements, wherein the shareholders or *pangukarrar* could also participate in the management of lands and to share in the rents from lands leased out and in profits from orchards, forests, tanks and other property held in common in proportion to their shares. There were also large landholders in virtually every village—the *mirasidar*s, many of whom were Vellalas and who dominated practically every aspect of village life. In some areas mirasdars as a group collected land revenue and stood security for it. They acted collectively in several matters related to irrigation projects, for example, or in relation to temple affairs. Among the cultivating groups we find two categories, namely the resident and the non-resident and who paid fixed rents in cash or in kind per acre. There were several untouchable castes who could be servile labour and who were also found in non-agricultural pursuits.

Mirasidar

Co-parcenary title holder and designated revenue payer. The term was familiar in southern India. This landowner had the power to command retainers who tilled his land and received their subsistence from him.

Above the village level, it is not clear what the pre-British rates of land tax were. It is possible that the rates were almost 50 per cent but there is considerable controversy over the authorities—king, local chieftain or local assembly—to whom these taxes were paid. It was this complex and confusing scenario that the British found themselves in, especially as more and more swathes of territory came under their control. Officials like Alexander Read and Thomas Munro, who were in charge of districts that came under the Madras government after the fall of Seringapatam, felt that collecting taxes directly from peasants enabled them to lower assessment rates and collect more taxes. Munro, who came to India as an ordinary military cadet, became collector of the ceded districts in 1800 and introduced scientific methods of survey, assessment and settlement besides granting *pattas* or title deeds to peasant cultivators. He was convinced that dealing with the cultivator was the best basis for a settlement and that such a settlement was also the indigenous practice in the region. Starting in the ceded districts

Patta

Patta title deed or legal evidence of a person's right to property

with four surveyors, he surveyed and assessed the tract field by field and fixed a standard assessment a little below the average actual conditions. His strategy paid off as he nursed the districts that had been overrun by anarchic political insecurity—keeping the demand low at first and then raising it gradually as ryots accumulated stock, gained confidence and extended cultivation. In fact when he left the district in 1807, he put on record a recommendation of a 25 per cent reduction in the standard assessment. Thus, what is striking about the ryotwari system's introduction is how grounded it was in actual experience rather than in rhetoric, although the consequences were not as anticipated.

It was in 1801 that Thomas Munro introduced the ryotwari system in the ceded districts and subsequently it began to be extended to the rest of the presidency by 1822. The beginnings had been made in 1792 in the Canara district. Under the system, each field was to be surveyed, its output estimated and then converted into cash. Each field was registered in the name of the *raiyat* or peasant, sometimes referred to as the *pattadar* who was directly responsible for the payment of the revenue. The rates followed were meant to conform to precedent—Munro believed that the state share of the produce could not exceed one-third, and in practice also was flexible enough to reduce this. In that sense, the settlement was not permanent as it had to make allowances. In fact, the amount of land revenue varied from district to district and often, the cultivator was left with very little—in North Arcot in 1808 there were villages where the raiyat received just a quarter of the crop while in Coimbatore, the land revenue was estimated to have fallen from one-third to one-quarter; Thanjavur was another favoured district. But in principle there was the notion of a fixed revenue assessment that was predicated on the idea of the state being the main landlord.

What were the implications of the ryotwari system and what were its consequences? Like the Permanent Settlement it aimed at creating propertied classes in land but this was to be vested with the peasantry and aimed to secure to the cultivators the fruits of their improvement. It also worked with the idea of a permanent assessment that alone could instill a sense of security, even if this could not be put to practice. Munro mentioned this in his minute, 'In order to

make the land generally saleable, to encourage the *ryot*s to improve it and to regard it as permanent hereditary property, the assessment must be fixed and more moderate in general than it is now and above all so clearly defined as not to be liable to increase from ignorance or caprice.' At the same time, the extraordinary intervention of the state in knowing the areas that were to be surveyed and assessed meant a different role for the British collector who in every sense became the guardian of the district. For Munro the government had to be represented simply and directly to the peasant 'not by a multiplicity of officers and written forms, but by a single officer, who had powers to inquire, to judge, and to punish, without the delay and intricacies of Western legal process. The officer was not to be a distant and awful figure, presiding in his cutcherry like a deity in his temple, but a familiar lord, visiting and speaking with them of their quarrels and their crops, and looked up to as ma-bap, father and mother'(Stokes, *The English Utilitarians and India).* Such an interventionist role meant a very different kind of system for Madras referred to as the Madras system of administration. This involved not just more hands-on collectors but scores of subordinate Indian officers at the levels of revenue and judicial administration.

To what extent were the intentions of Munro and his merry men realised through the ryotwari system? It is true that as an administrator, Munro held a very special place among his subjects—legend has it that even composers composed for him as a mark of respect. Burton Stein, however, argues that Munro never questioned the authoritarian basis of British rule and that he believed that it had to continue long enough before Indians could assume custodianship of the state. What was important to factor in was to avoid radical innovation without comprehending the reality on the ground. As he put it, 'Our great error in this country has been too much precipitation in attempting to better the conditions of the people, with hardly any knowledge of the means by which it was to be accomplished.... The ruling vice of our Government is innovation, and its innovation has been so little guided by a knowledge of the people that it must seem to them little better than caprice ... our anxiety to make everything as English as possible in a country which resembles England in nothing'. On the economic front,

the effects of the settlement do not seem to have fully satisfied the administrator's expectations. In fact, whether the system was able to develop a genuine land market in south India and invest peasants with rights remains a more debatable issue. As mentioned earlier, assessment rates and the actual experience of rural society in southern India varied enormously. In many areas no surveys were carried out and ryots were subject to arbitrary taxation. Nilmani Mukherjee's findings revealed that Tanjore remained untamed and that no field surveys were done on the basis of which pattas were supposed to be issued. The mirasidars in Tanjore, Trichinopoly and Tirunelveli opposed fixed cash assessments on fields, since productivity and profitability depended on the variable irrigation source of the monsoons. Coimbatore was the solitary exception. Also, subsequent officials set aside Munro's insistence that cultivators be given the freedom to take as much or as little land as he chose to. This meant that cultivating peasants in many areas were impoverished and could not contemplate any extension in cultivation. Furthermore, the system hardly displaced the dominant rural elites. As privileged rent holders and special rights of mirasidars were recognised, the existing structure was not substantially altered. In fact, it would appear that the existing social balance was further buttressed by ideology and colonial knowledge production that extolled the mirasidar and the Vellala elite, not to speak of the Brahmin collaborator. According to David Ludden, locally influential mirasidars manipulated the situation to their advantage to get privileged rents and convert their collective rights into individual property rights. The Madras government showed no interest in safeguarding the interests of the peasants despite their struggle against mirasidar power. Van Schendel also makes a similar point for the Kaveri delta where he suggests that mirasidars entrenched their control over land and labour resources. There were similar tendencies at work in Trichinopoly district, while in South Arcot and Chinglepet, cultivators were able to challenge *mirasi* rights. In other areas over time there was further stratification and some places saw the emergence of a middle peasantry at a later stage towards the end of the nineteenth century.

The ryotwari system was also applied to parts of the Bombay Presidency in the areas corresponding to modern Maharashtra and

Gujarat. However, it must be remembered that the decision to settle directly with peasants was not always inspired by clear ideological commitments, but was in fact determined by considerations of expediency and pragmatism. The aim everywhere was to realise steadily increasing revenue, to safeguard a politically stable population and to dispense with older practices if they were seen as destructive. In the directly annexed territories of the Peshwa for example, care was taken to abandon the practice of revenue farming that had produced deleterious effects.

The British conquest of western India had occurred in two phases: Gujarat fell to them in 1803 while the greater part of the Bombay presidency came in 1818 and Sind was annexed as late as 1843. There were marked variations in tenurial arrangements, making it difficult for the British to adopt a standard set of formulaic practices. Maratha territories were characterised by a complex agrarian structure dominated by hereditary landholders, tenants and labourers as well as by recipients of inam lands. There were hereditary deshmukhs who held land liable to low rates of revenue, there were influential village *patils* or headmen with whom the government official or *mamlatdar* engaged for the collection of land revenue. Two-thirds of the Peshwa's territories were directly taxed. One-third of the gross produce seems to have gone to the government. There were additional cesses as well. Revenue farming was ubiquitously practiced, especially in the last years of the Peshwa's regime. There was kin-based ownership of common lands in villages. Village affairs were managed by the *panch*—the bulk of village lands excluding waste and common lands were divided into *thal*s or estates that were over time subdivided and held by kin groups—*jatha*s of mirasidars who were jointly responsible for payment of government dues on the holding. Each member of the jatha could cultivate his share of the holding as he pleased. Besides this miras land, there were other categories—waste, common and inam. Land could be and was leased out to outsiders or *uparis*.

Upari

Upari was a category of tenancy tenure held under the Maratha regime.

The British victory over the Maratha confederacy was followed by a period of experimentation. Responding to the excesses of the Maratha farming system, British officials abolished the practice and

also commuted forced labour into cash. Initially the collectors did not wish to deal with the village communities that reflected the power of the patil and rich peasant, and proposed that the village be made collectively responsible for payment, but only after the amount of individual cultivators had been thoroughly examined. The first assessment of 1818, however, proved to be very high, leading to indebtedness and to cultivators mortgaging their crops. The system came for review and in 1828 Robert Keith Pringle was appointed Superintendent of the Revenue Survey and Assessment of the Deccan. He drew up a detailed statement that demonstrated the importance of careful classification of land types and of moving away from the assessment proportioned to the gross produce. His method involved the calculation of the average gross produce per biga (2/3 acre) for nine separate soil qualities, turning this into money value and finally deducting the cost of production and interest on the stock employed so as to arrive at the net produce. The total demand of the district was fixed after a general consideration of its past history and present condition, but everywhere the demand was distributed as a fixed proportion of the estimated net produce, and as far as possible, this was around 55 per cent throughout the area under settlement. Pringle's scheme was criticised on the grounds of being too severe and theoretical and was replaced in 1835 by a reformed Bombay survey system devised by Wingate and Goldsmid. The new assessment was to be made on no fixed principle—neither as a share of the gross produce nor net produce nor rental value. The only rule was to ensure that the assessment did not exceed the ability of the cultivators to pay it

This new arrangement aimed at lowering the assessment to practical limits, taking into consideration past experience, current prices and the nature of soil and location. In practice, the settlement officer also took into account expected increases in prices and output over thirty years during which the rates would remain fixed. The total was then subdivided among villages. The mirasi and upari tenures were merged; whatever the older status, the occupant had the same rights. The assessment would be revised every thirty years, and no additional taxes could be levied for improvement made by the occupant, but he could forfeit his lands if he did not pay land

revenue. Lands could be freely alienated and transferred—this way they could move from inefficient to efficient occupants.

The results of the settlement were important. It actually reduced revenue rates to a greater extent on poorer soils than on better ones. There was rapid extension of cultivation on waste lands. On the other hand the status of the patil was severely circumscribed. The social consequences of the new system have been a subject of debate. Neil Charlesworth argued that the ryotwari system introduced between 1840 and 1870 did not usher in dramatic change in the agrarian structure of western India, and the reduction of the status of the patil to a mere government employee was part of an older process of erosion. Sumit Guha and Ravinder Kumar on the other hand argue that the alterations in the status of the village headmen had long term implications and fed into rural dissatisfaction that found expression in the Deccan riots of the late nineteenth century. It would seem logical to conclude that the manner in which the colonial state intervened in rural society did produce major dislocations, even if there were such tendencies at work even earlier. The fact that the British gave an institutional fillip to these changes is significant.

In Gujarat, that also formed part of the Bombay presidency, the manifestation of the ryotwari settlement came in the form of what was more conventionally called the direct agency system of management or *amani*. The cessions by the Gaekwad and Peshwa in south Gujarat were on both sides of the Gulf of Cambay and were divided into the three collectorships of Kaira, Broach and Surat. The two major administrators of the region, Colonel Alexander Walker and Jonathan Duncan (1795–1811) were conservative in temperament, but a major change occurred with the coming of Sir Evan Nepean (1812–19) who emphasised the necessity of efficiency and regularity in revenue collection.

In the region of the Gujarat plains and subsequently of Cutch and Kathiawar, tenurial arrangements were complex and there were a miscellany of landed interests and village types to deal with. There were what was known as *rasti* or peaceful villages, there were unpacified villages. In the rasti category, there were patidar shareholders who held joint villages and were responsible for the payment of revenue. There were unshared villages as well where each landowner was

specifically responsible for the revenue on land. There were tenants in both kinds of villages who paid in cash, kind and labour. The majority of the villages were unshared while the lands of the share hold villages were divided into several major divisions held by kin groups of peasants. Each major division was represented by the head of the most senior family of the division and the representatives of all the major decisions managed the affairs of the village, and gave some part of the common lands as inam. One striking feature of the Gujarat revenue system under the Marathas had been the close involvement of bankers with the process of revenue collection. Every intermediary had to provide a guarantee from a banker (*manotidar*) when making his contract. At the outset of British rule in 1803, the *manoti* was said to be as high as 25 per cent but by 1819 had fallen to 2 per cent on average. There were zamindars or *girasia*s who exercised seigniorial rights and whose power the British tried to restrain.

The decision of Nepean to introduce the direct European agency of management was a product of pragmatism and administrative expediency. It resembled the ryotwari system in part—and the idea was to bypass the rural elites to settle more directly with the cultivator. Alienated lands were registered and powers of *desai* were limited. In shared villages, the British recognised the principle of joint responsibility for revenue, although they indicated that the villages could be converted into ryotwari ones by giving up the surplus waste to the government and registering each landholder as a separate occupant. In fact, share held villages were converted for the most part and 136 out of 138 villages in northern Surat were converted into ryotwari. The cash rate was calculated at half the gross produce and was in fact high. The situation deteriorated even further when agricultural prices fell and Western India entered a period of depression in the 1830s and 1840s.

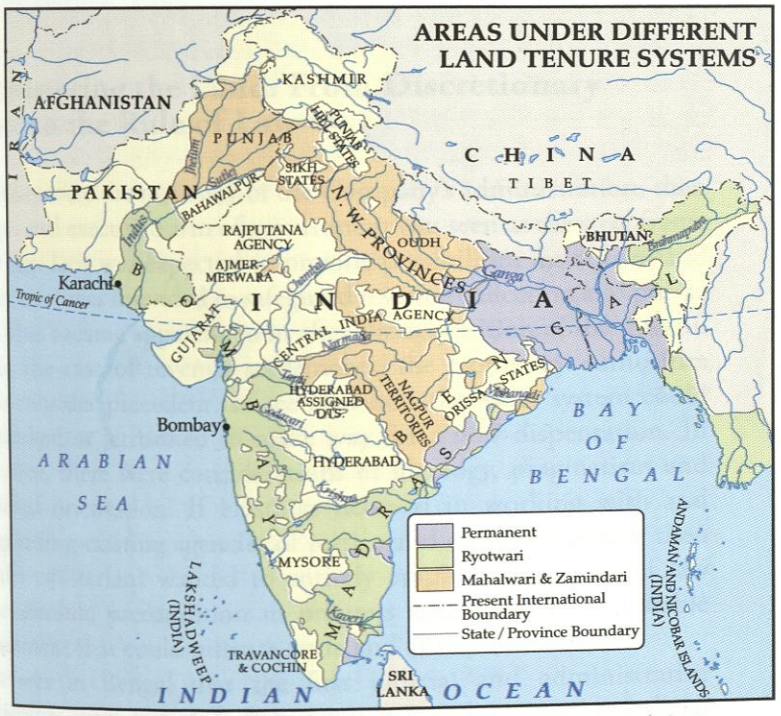
If pragmatism and expediency had been the markers of British settlement policies in western India, the situation was no different in north-western India where the Mahalwari settlement was put into effect. As in the case of other regions, the convulsions in the social and agrarian structure in the decades of transition between 1800 and 1820 played a major role in suggesting the outlines of the new revenue system

Mckenzie and the Mahalwari System

The annexation of the Upper Gangetic region was followed by the formation of the Ceded and Conquered Provinces in 1801–3. This region accommodated a complex mosaic of zamindari rights—of landed magnate power ranging from affluent *raja*s and *taluqdar*s to primary zamindars who held proprietary rights over agriculture and also included owner-cultivators and proprietors of large villages. Initially the British settled with the powerful magnates, but the settlements were badly conceptualised and implemented even worse. The result was the dispossession of several taluqdars, many of whom lost their estates by 1820. Their lands, sold in auction, were bought up by amlahs and *tehsildar*s who came to represent a new class. The British settlement with these men carried the provision that revenue management could be held only when they had the zamindari title and for this they went to all sorts of devices to make their claims. One could in fact say that in these conditions of fluidity, the primary zamindars were beginning to assert themselves. Of course it is easy to exaggerate the development as Thomas Metcalf suggests, although there was an impression of a radical break, a major change, the 'melancholy revolution' as Holt Mckenzie put it. 'What happened was to disjoint the whole frame of village societies to deprive multitudes of rights of property which their families had held for ages and to reduce a high spirited class of men from the pride of independence to the situation of labourers on their paternal fields'. Mckenzie's own idea was to rely on the village community and co-parcenary bodies. He argued that the taluqdars and revenue farmers had no shred of title to hereditary rights of collection. They had gained their position through fraud and now the state had the right to resume their offices and confer on them any class it chose. He believed that the original property right belonged to the village community and it had to be given the responsibility of revenue collection. In conformity with the utilitarian distrust of private rent property, the right was to amount to no more than the allowance of 1/10th on the existing collection—the village brotherhood was to be prevented from collecting more than this by framing a register of cultivators' payments in each village. His recommendations

became part of the 1822 settlement that provided for a detailed field-to-field survey for revenue assessment. Taluqdars were not completely displaced but wherever possible, joint proprietary right was vested in the village community. The settlement, however, did not work and coinciding with a period of agricultural depression, land remained uncultivated and buyers non-existent. This set the stage for a revision, which was initiated by R. M. Bird. The latter suggested a detailed survey to assess the revenue of an entire *mahal* or unit based on the net value of potential produce of the field. The total revenue thus fixed was to be shared by the members of a co-sharing body. Two-thirds of the net revenue for the land was to be designated as the state share while the duration of the settlement was thirty years. This time around too, the settlements were based on faulty assessments and created extremely difficult conditions for landed society. In some cases, land was taken by money-lenders and there were evident signs of a major relocation in the social groups of North Indian agrarian society. The resultant tension fed into a cumulative sense of grievances that directly fuelled the mutiny of 1857.

Thus by the first half of the nineteenth century, the Company government had put into place revenue settlements that were intended to realise their immediate objectives, namely maximisation of revenue and the investment of collection responsibilities with groups as they saw fit. Considerations of ideology and expediency determined the choice of specific settlements in different parts of the country, although in all cases the tendency to select locally powerful leaders and groups prevailed. As Frykenberg argued for the Guntur district in Madras, the village whether under the zamindari or the ryotwari system was subject to the exactions of the same chain of hereditary office-holders and petty revenue collectors. Also, Company officials acted largely on the information that they were given by locals, and as Stein has described it in the context of southern India, they were helplessly ignorant about the people they were governing. This is not to suggest that British intervention and the innovations they brought with them in the sphere of land revenue had no impact and represented a simple continuity with older social structures. Change occurred differentially at different



levels and different regions; the old political elites had definitely lost out, landed elites were subject to change and regulation and even extinction in some cases and it was only the administrative elites that would appear to have responded positively. To understand this we shall look at the administrative reforms, especially in the fields of police reform and the judiciary, and how these set a new apparatus for administrative groups to fill in and operate.

Administering the Land: From Discretionary Justice to the Rule of Law

If revenues were the mainstay of the Company's administration, then the legal and executive arm of government was seen as the steel frame of the Raj. Law was expected to provide possibilities for reform and the executive was intended to safeguard revenue collection and public order. This became apparent soon after the acquisition of the diwani. Like in the case of revenue settlements, the Company authorities had to consider precedent, to see how best the older system could be reworked or jettisoned to make way for a new dispensation. In both cases, there were considerations of ideology, pragmatism and individual orientation. If Hastings believed in working with and strengthening existing agencies of justice and executive power, then the later utilitarians wanted to entirely emphasise the rule of law as the absolute precondition to progress and security, to a stable environment that could nurture trade and attract investment.

It was in Bengal that the first judicial and administrative experiments were initiated. Between 1765 and 1772, the judicial administration remained in the hands of Indian officers, the Company following the Mughal system in virtually all its aspects. Under the Mughal system of provincial administration, the *faujdar* was the principal officer and who represented the nazim. Admittedly, local landlords and magnates enjoyed magisterial authority that the State endorsed provided it did not contravene its authority. The Mughal system of justice was characterised by discretionary justice and by a balance between the State's punitive authority and that of its magnate subjects. In the rural areas, zamindars enjoyed magisterial

powers and these had been considerably enhanced in the course of the eighteenth century. Other judicial officers in the Mughal system were the *kazi* and the *kotwal* who provided the necessary interpretative skills needed to apply the *sharia*. In cases of civil disputes relating to inheritance, marriage and property, Hindus were judged by their customary laws while in criminal cases; the law of the state was upheld. What distinguished the Mughal system was the ways in which it extended its punitive jurisdiction over the punitive and restitutive claims of its subjects. Thus, the faujdar's responsibility was to curb the powers of the landlords and revenue farmers. This did not nullify the inherently despotic nature of the Mughal regime, something the Company officials were only too happy to elaborate upon. This was so especially after Buxar, when Company officials condemned the excessive power enjoyed by zamindars and revenue farmers and argued that more direct European supervision was necessary to ensure a centralisation of the judicial prerogative. By 1769, the Company authorities were convinced that the overall system had to be centralised both in terms of the authority to be vested in an office as well as in terms of procedures. There were other concerns too—namely the interpretation of law and scriptures especially as the state—whether Mughal or early colonial—still relied on the experts for interpretation of Hindu law and sharia. The more immediate concerns were to ensure law and public order, and to resolve civil suits without delay and this could not be done by separating the revenue functions from magistracy and justice

Under Warren Hastings, the first steps were taken towards this end. Assuming power in 1772, he was fully cognisant of the need to retain the existing form of judicature for administrative and political reasons. For one, the knowledge of Company servants about India was incomplete and fragmented and on the other hand, the indigenous population was unfamiliar with the institutions or philosophy of their new masters. At the same time, Hastings imagined that the established forms in the province were best calculated for expediting justice and safeguarding the best interests of the people.

The intentions behind the new regulations that were put in place were partly to grapple with the problems of revenue-related civil suits, with the maintenance and with the protection of the inhabitants

against the exactions of landed magnates and revenue farmers. These involved on the one hand arming district collectors with powers of revenue collection as well as magistracy, and on the other the creation of a hierarchy of courts that would help bypass problems of jurisdiction. These efforts did not yield immediate results, forcing the government to think of successive amendments until a thorough separation of justice from revenue was proposed by Cornwallis.

Under the plan of 1772, each district was to have a civil and criminal court—civil courts were presided over by European District Collectors who were to be assisted by Brahmin pandits and maulvis. Criminal courts were under a qazi and maulvi but they too were under the supervision of the European Collectors. There were two appeal courts in Calcutta—the Sadar Diwani Adalat and the Sadar Nizamat Adalat, which was entrusted to a native *daroga* appointed by the Governor himself. In each court, the judges were helped by native assessors who were skilled in Hindu and Islamic law respectively. The Sadar Diwani Adalat was authorised to try and settle appeals from decisions of the district courts in all cases exceeding Rs 500 in value. The controlling councils of revenue in Murshidabad and Patna were abolished in September 1772 and district courts placed directly under the Sadar Diwani. There were procedural improvements as collectors were required to hold their courts at least twice a week and to see that servants and officers of the court did not obstruct their proceedings. In land-related disputes, collectors were authorised to appoint amins who acted as commissioners, made local investigations and submitted his reports. Rules were also drawn to restrain moneylenders from putting pressure on debtors. At the same time, to discourage litigation, there was a time limit of twelve years after which complaints could not be subject to action. The old practice of arbitrary fines and perquisites that zamindars had claimed was abolished. In short, the plan of 1772 was largely intended to reconstitute the superior courts in a manner that would avoid conflicts of jurisdiction and specify its limits more precisely. These were also calculated to restrict the scope of arbitrariness.

Between 1773 and 1780 further changes were introduced partly to counter the problems of revenue collection and partly in response to the recurrent demand of separating the executive

from the judiciary. A lot of the concerns behind legal overhauling was to do with collection related disputes, arrears in justice and a slow demand for Europeanisation of the service. The changes were largely put together by Hastings and Elijah Impey the chief justice of the Calcutta High Court. District collectors were stripped of their judicial duties District courts were replaced by 18 *mufussil* courts presided over by European covenanted servants of the Company who were designated as judges. The Mofussil Diwani Adalat was given full powers in the trial of all civil suits of real and personal property including those of inheritance and succession to zamindari and other hereditary estates. The Sadar Diwani Adalat was reconstituted in Calcutta as an appeal court. By this, a clear distinction was made between revenue and purely civil suits under sections 3 and 4 of the 1780 plan—the former included all demands of rent, revenue and of persons involved in their collection. The latter looked after cases of inheritance. There were procedural changes as well; all judicial business was to be transacted in writing. Thus, the reforms introduced two trends—one, the Europeanisation of the services and secondly, the systematisation of the civil justice system. Not that these reforms were not periodically reversed—for example, in 1787 the collectors were once more entrusted with the duty of administering civil justice. Important changes were initiated in the field of criminal administration and police, which we shall have occasion to refer to later.

It was under Lord Cornwallis that the most decisive steps were taken towards the setting up of a civil service and towards the separation of the judiciary from revenue affairs. A covenanted service was established when district collectors were put on a firm footing and were asked to sign a covenant accepting their service, its terms and conditions and committing themselves not to accept presents or prestation.

An abiding principle behind the new judicial reforms that Lord Cornwallis developed was the principle of the Rule of Law, and the idea that only an independent judiciary would secure a firm foundation for private property and personal rights, and would check the abuse of executive power. At the same time there were immediate considerations—the backlog of pending cases and the

acts of oppression on the part of Indian agents had to be addressed immediately, and in doing this, the new Governor-General openly expressed his disdain and lack of confidence in Indians. As he reported, more than 60,000 cases remained undecided and the reason for this was because the Collector was first and foremost a revenue officer who could hardly be expected to pay the same kind of interest or attention to the judicial charge. The need of the hour, therefore, was an absolute and rigid separation of the two departments and the appointment of English judges on a large scale.

Under the Cornwallis system, three things were emphasised. One, revenue collection was separated from civil justice. Two, there was an ascending hierarchy of courts from the lowest level to the highest in Calcutta. Thirdly, there was the notional integration of the Indian subjects into the imperial fold, as they could in theory appeal even to the Privy Council in England. For civil justice, every district was now provided with a civil court having original as well as appellate jurisdiction over all inhabitants, except the English who were under the special jurisdiction of an apex court in Calcutta. The lowest courts presided over by Indian *munsif*s and *amin*s tried petty civil suits. Appeals against them lay to the district courts presided over by a European judge, aided by Indian experts. Four provincial courts of appeal were set up in Calcutta, Patna, Dacca and Murshidabad to hear appeals from district courts—each of the provincial courts was presided over by three European judges, a registrar, qazi and pandit. An appeal against the provincial courts' decision could be made to the Sadar Diwani Adalat and there was a further legal channel to lodge an appeal in special cases against decisions of the apex courts (Sadar Diwani Adalat and Sadar Nizamat Adalat) to the Privy Council of England. Judges were guaranteed generous salaries and were assisted by native commissioners—amin or referee, *sali*s or arbitrator and munsif or native judge. In order to reduce the workload at the district level, Commissioners could hear cases not exceeding Rs 50 in value.

Sadar Diwani Adalat

High Court of civil and revenue jurisdiction

Sadar Nizamat Adalat

High Court for criminal jurisdiction

The administration of criminal justice was also reformed by Cornwallis. The pattern of lower courts at the district was similar to

that of civil courts, and very often the powers of civil and criminal justice were vested in the same people. The Lowest criminal court officials were munsifs, amins and magistrates or justices of the peace—all district judges wielded civil and criminal powers. Death sentences could be passed by the district court, but had to be confirmed by the Supreme Court or Sadar Nizamat Adalat in Calcutta. The faujdari adalat was also transformed and put under the charge of European judges and the Sadar Nizamat Adalat was brought back to Calcutta and placed under the personal supervision of the Governor-General-in-Council.

The Cornwallis Code also provided for the appointment of *vakils* or Indian pleaders to serve at the courts of judicature in Bengal, Bihar and Orissa. The regulations further stipulated that judges could commute the sentence of mutilation and amputation into hard labour. The entire exercise rested on the principle of exclusion of Indians from the judicial service, as well as from the covenanted services, and marked a hardening of attitudes on the part of the colonial state.

The Cornwallis Code was extended to the province of Banaras in 1795 and to the Ceded and Conquered Provinces in 1803 and 1805 respectively. Attempts to introduce this in the ryotwari settled areas in the Madras Presidency faltered, as the conception of the Collector and his powers was ordered around entirely different principles. On Munro's suggestions, the judicial system in Madras relied on greater Indian agency as well as on the intervention of Indian institutions like the panchayat. As it happened, the Cornwallis Code, despite its lofty conception, did not deliver. One of the intended objects, namely speedy justice, remained unrealised—the number of pending suits on his departure remained staggering, partly because of inexperience and partly because of the expenses of judicial redress. Also the law itself remained unchanged and Cornwallis was cognisant of the fact that he had not been able to establish a good system of laws. Successive administrators introduced amendments mostly to speed up justice and improve procedure and invest judges with more powers, thereby relieving the congestion in courts. In 1807, for example, additional courts were established and in 1807 the number of judges in the sadar courts was increased. The codification of laws, however, remained unaddressed until the advent of Lord William Bentinck, whose tenure coincided with an important period of legal and social reform.

Bentinck's immediate task was to establish a general system of justice and police, and a code of laws common to the whole people of India. His judicial reforms also reflected his decision to 'Indianise' the services. This had financial implications, especially as the British faced pecuniary constraints. His measures threw open responsible employment in the judicial and executive service to Indian candidates. It must be remembered that the Cornwallis system even in its heyday did not convince everyone—Munro especially in the south resisted the system with all its implications. The task of legal codification was undertaken by Lord Macaulay and was completed by 1837, but its implementation had to wait.

The task of maintaining public order was continued alongside. The process of British expansion and pacification was not an easy one, and dislocated substantial sections of agrarian society, leading to uprisings and expressions of disaffection. The Company state had to device a system of police that worked in tandem with the system of criminal justice.

Policing Crime and Criminal Justice

The British inherited a system wherein magisterial and judicial power had been vested in part with the zamindars and with the state officer or the faujdar. The State made over some police functions to the zamindars, who dominated the rural hierarchy. In the villages, there were various categories of watchmen who enjoyed both revenue collection as well as peace keeping responsibilities. There were village watchmen, *chaukidar*s or *paik*s who were granted land assignments as part of their emoluments. In urban areas, there was the kotwal and the qazi, whose knowledge of the scripture was invaluable as he was called upon to interpret Islamic law, which constituted the basis of criminal justice. Between Plassey and the removal of Muhammed Reza Khan, the existing system was retained, but after 1770 its inadequacies were exposed by spiraling crime. The faujdari system,

however, continued with minor modifications; in 1781 faujdars were replaced by European magistrates. Zamindars and faujdari officers were made subordinate to the Europeans as ancillary instruments of peace keeping. The Sadar Nizamat Adalat was stationed in Murshidabad, while a covenanted servant of the Company was appointed as Remembrancer of Criminal Courts, with powers to demand and receive monthly reports from police magistrates and zamindars.

These piecemeal reforms did not improve matters either in terms of public order and peace or in terms of demarcating clear fields of jurisdiction and authority. The number of magistracies proved far too inadequate, while the zamindars continued to exploit the situation to their advantage. It was under these circumstances that Lord Cornwallis decided to implement his regulations. Under his system, the districts were divided into *thanas* or police jurisdictions of 20–30 miles square, and over each of them was appointed an officer of government under the denomination of daroga with a supporting establishment consisting of *muharir, jamadar* and *barkandaz*. The daroga was nominated by the magistrate and enjoyed a monthly salary of Rs 25 and a 10 per cent commission of the value of stolen goods that he had recovered. It was his duty to apprehend persons charged with crimes and to send them under custody to magistrates. He had no authority to pass sentence or inflict punishments. The idea behind the reforms was to check the authority of the zamindars and establish a uniform and centralised structure of judicial administration.

The creation of the daroga as an instrument of control introduced a new element in rural society. As an agent of the Company, his responsibility was to maintain order and represent the Company's power, but ground realities required him to ally with zamindars. The emerging daroga-zamindar nexus resulted in more oppression as far as the ryots were concerned. European planters, Indian zamindars and tehsildars made full use of darogas and *lathiyals* to keep the peasantry under control. The oppressive aspects of the system were not lost on British administrators, some of whom, like Duncan, proposed modification when the system was

Lathiyal

Petty armed officers assisting zamindars as well as darogas

extended to Banaras. The daroga system was introduced into Madras in 1803 and 1804 but without much efficacy. In 1812, the office was done away with completely and the supervision of the village police was left with the collector in Madras. In Bengal the system was continued, although after 1817 the darogas were made more subservient to the District Magistrates.

Thus, by the third quarter of the nineteenth century, two sets of changes had been registered. The English East India Company was no longer the body that it had been; a private commercial organisation holding a monopoly of the East India trade, but had become a powerful imperial agency, albeit under parliamentary supervision. It exercised control over territories containing millions of inhabitants. Secondly, the Company had acquired an ideology of rule which it applied to the territories that were pressed into the form of a cohesive political unit, with a new apparatus of rule based on revenue extraction, administrative control and public order. A new dispensation based on the Rule of Law had come into being and was substantially different from the one it inherited. Although the Company had been forced, for one reason or the other, to rework existing institutions in varying degrees of fidelity, the system that emerged by the 1840s was undoubtedly different from what the Mughals had left behind. Under the new revenue system, the idea of private property was definitely more clearly articulated. Even if in many areas older rural elites continued to be lynchpins of the new system, there were major changes in the unfolding situation which they had to take into account. In the judicial department the changes were even more evident: for one, the judicial procedures were much more streamlined and although the problems of flawed and inconsistent procedure persisted, the idea of an impersonal rule of law was a major change. It was another matter whether the subject population comprehended the new system—whether they could make sense of judicial interpretations that were no longer local affairs. It was not just the physical location of the new courts but the psychological connotations of approaching courts of judicature that they were no longer familiar with. Not that this confusion was confined only to the subjects of empire; the Company, in quest for legitimacy, for a very long time invoked the idea of continuity

with Mughal institutions, even as it initiated a system that was radically different from the Mughal state in its conceptions as well as in its functioning. One consequence of the identity crisis was the production of a historiography that stressed the benefits of Pax Britannica and the despotism and decay of late Mughal India. Not that the rhetoric as far as Pax Britannica was entirely false—the benefits of the rule of law and of new institutions were profound but there were major gaps. There are allusions to criminality and social banditry right through the eighteenth and first half of the nineteenth century—references to growing disaffection among several segments of the rural population leading up to the violence of 1857 that highlighted the turbulence of the transition from the Mughal Empire to the Company Bahadur. The reasons for the conflagration were to be found in the complex effects of British rule and its intervention in the society and economy of India. If law and administration revealed the positive face of British rule in India, the regulation of the Indian economy and the stranglehold on its trade reflected the coercive dimension of colonial rule. Social reform went hand in hand with economic exploitation, and the reorientation of India's economy and creation of a dependent class of collaborators. It is to this the colonial reworking of society and economy that we shall now turn our attention.

Governors of Bengal and Governor-Generals of India

Governors of the Presidency of Fort William (Bengal), 1774–1833

Warren Hastings (1773–85)
Sir John Macpherson (1785–86)
The Earl of Cornwallis (1786–93)
Sir John Shore (1793–98)
The Earl of Mornington (1798–1805)
The Marquess Cornwallis (1805)
Sir George Barlow (acting) 1805–7
Lord Minto (1807–13)
The Earl of Moira (1813–23)
John Adam (1823)
Lord Amherst (1823–28)
Lord William Bentinck (1828–33)

Governors-General of India (1833–58)

Lord William Bentinck (1833–35)
Sir Charles Metcalf (1835–36)
Lord Auckland (1836–42)
Lord Ellenborough (1842–44)
Sir Henry Hardinge (1844–48)
The Earl of Dalhousie (1848–56)
The Viscount Canning (1856–58)

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Chapter 4

Economic Development and Social Change under Company Rule

We have tracked the processes of political expansion and its attendant consolidation in the period between Plassey and the first quarter of the nineteenth century. We have seen how a trading Company was able to secure actual physical control over an extensive territory and how it proceeded thereafter to make sense of its newly conquered dominions by imposing a set of ideas that facilitated revenue collection and administration. According to a recent work by Jon Wilson, the Company sought to impose stable forms of meaning in a world they barely understood and developed a new approach to government in order to rule people they perceived as strangers. However, as far as the question of dominance went, the Company had no qualms about imposing restrictive trade practices in order to guarantee its own operations and to serve the interests of its own servants as well as free traders. In the half century following Plassey, the Company was able to establish its stranglehold over the trading economy of India, and in the process introduced major structural changes that affected a variety of groups from the humble cultivator to the city-based retail merchant. Alongside the enforcement of control and rule, the Company intervened, with varying degrees of efficacy, in social matters, using two principal agencies of change, namely law and education. These two instruments of social change worked through a network of Indian cooperation and helped in the formation of new social groups and elites, who subsequently assumed responsibility

for political representation and home rule. In this chapter, we shall look at some of the changes that British rule brought about in the economic structure and social fabric of India.

We may recall that the English East India Company was primarily a trading corporation that intended to secure monopoly privileges over the East India trade and also subsequently to edge out all competition in the inter-Asian trade. Notwithstanding its growing concerns with land revenue, the Company never lost sight of its trading objectives. It deployed its newly acquired political power after Plassey to control channels of production and distribution, as well as the high reaches of export-import traffic. Bengal was among the first province to suffer the onslaught of colonial penetration; it was here that the articulation of a typical colonial economy found expression as early as the end of the eighteenth century. Admittedly the inter-connectedness of trading activities in eighteenth century India meant that none of the regions were fully exempt from the effects of British hegemony. Inversely, it was also Bengal that first enjoyed the benefits of colonial education and a wealthy modern elite emerged to acquire the language of modernity and to assume social leadership. We will first look at the Bengal case and then follow it up with the experience of other regions and finally come up with some large formulations.

For purposes of convenience, we may look at the period 1757–1857 in two broad phases, at the end of which a full-fledged colonial economy had emerged, one that was fully adjusted to meet the requirements of the metropolitan economy at home. In the first phase, i.e. between 1757 and 1793, the English Company operated what C. A. Bayly refers to as a proto-colonial economy where local factors intersected with global ones. It was a time, when some commercial groups were able to operate their ventures and local demand as well as Asian demand in the Indian Ocean continued to be an important determinant of production activity in south Asia. According to K. N. Chaudhuri, the foreign trade of India between 1757 and 1813 retained its pre-modern character, and sections of it continued to be in the hands of indigenous merchants. However, this is not to suggest that the Company did not attempt to minimise competition and to restrict production activity to suit their own

requirements, or that in terms of volume, wealth and influence, the English in Bengal did not occupy a commanding position. Also there were major changes after 1793, when the situation changed and the Indian economy was subordinated to a global one, and was forced to service the multilateral trade and remittance transfers of the English Company, as well as British free traders. The export of Indian opium and cotton into China for Chinese tea consignments into Britain, supported by a complex web of bill transfers, was what characterised India's trade after 1793. The global flows accelerated the process of commercialisation, and simultaneously exposed the subcontinent to volatile fluctuations that were especially damaging to the hapless cultivator.

Between 1757 and 1793, the English East India Company decisively established its control over the export-import trade of India from the three principal coastal settlements of Calcutta, Bombay and Madras. The Company also steadily extended its influence over production networks, especially in Bengal where after Plassey, the Company servants expanded their influence on inland trade. Apart from heavy indemnity payments that they enjoyed from successive nawabs in Bengal, they were able to use their de facto power to control both the foreign and inland trade of Bengal. At the same time, the Plassey revolution completely altered the mode of financing the Company's investment. Before 1765, the Company had to import bullion worth almost 1 million pounds, as did other foreign traders. When this stopped, the entire banking and currency situation was thrown out of gear. The years also saw the Company's attempts in establishing a monopsony and in coercing manufacturers to work exclusively on their investments. This was buttressed by legal regulations that altered the status of weavers and artisans. In a sense these were closely interrelated developments. Even as Bengal was expected to produce export goods and also silver to finance the Company's trade in China, prices of export goods went up and which the Company had to control by attempting a monopsony.

Bengal, like Gujarat, was one of the premier maritime regions of Mughal India and was characterised by a high degree of commercialisation, that coexisted with a subsistence sector. This

was a consequence of Bengal's productive capacity to generate a surplus in food supplies combined with the advantages the region enjoyed in terms of its waterways and riverine transport. The bulk of the population remained in villages, whose needs for goods and services were satisfied through production for use and networks of reciprocal obligations. The exchange of goods, although relatively smaller, was considerable in its magnitude and complexity. There was a hierarchy of markets—for example, intra-local trade in the countryside was characterised by rural markets, the '*haat*' that supplied foodstuffs and other immediate necessities. There was a clear distinction between retail markets or the bazaar and wholesale ones or *mandi*s. Towns in Bengal commanded a more complex level of trade and exchange through bazaars and had their component of artisans and specialised manufactures, and marketed their products as well as the produce of other places. Urban markets not only catered for local consumption but also acted as emporia and entrepots, whence dealers from other places secured their supplies. A major feature of inter-local trade is the one-way flow of commodities from villages to towns. This derived from the older Mughal policy of collecting revenues in cash, which put pressure on the cultivators to sell. The urgent demand for cash to pay revenue *kist*s or dues and subsistence forced cultivators to sell as soon as harvesting was over. This was done through merchants, who were known to take advantage of peasant indebtedness and of their marketing knowledge.

The latter decades of the seventeenth century and the first quarter of the eighteenth saw a remarkable expansion of European commerce in Bengal. Bengali textiles constituted a key staple in the export trade and the European demand represented a major determinant of the productivity of Bengal's economy. Servicing this trade enabled several groups of merchants, especially supply and retail merchants, to emerge as major players and also yielded, according to Om Prakash, some benefits to the manufacturers. European demand was matched by the demand of Asian markets as well across the Indian Ocean, and encouraged substantial investment in this sector. The Bengal trading economy, even at the beginning of the eighteenth century, was dominated by a variety of ethnic

groups—Armenians, Mughals, Iranians and Gujaratis who traded in textiles and operated largely from the Mughal port town of Hugli. The growth of Calcutta and the expansion of English private trade was, however, a major challenge as Indian merchants, especially shippers, found themselves edged out of the freight traffic by the more seaworthy English vessels. At the same time, the jolts to Surat's trade in the eighteenth century as a consequence of Mughal decline and conditions of political instability in West Asian markets affected the operations of Asian merchants, making it virtually impossible for them to compete with their European rivals. By the 1730s and 1740s, European merchants had emerged as the major players in the export trade of the Indian Ocean. At the same time, the Company servants in their private capacity made inroads in the internal trade of Bengal and their operations made a dent on the existing system of procurements and purchase.

Production responded to increasing commercial expansion. Textile workers had two approaches to adjusting output to demand. Weavers of well-known varieties of cloth traditionally worked for the open market, as well as for particular merchants who provided working capital in return for a guaranteed supply of cloth, frequently of a special type suitable for export markets. These were not mutually exclusive and the same weaver could work to order during the busy export season and also decide to work at his own risk during the slack season. Whatever the method, it was unlikely for the weaver to be in direct contact with the final customer without any intermediary brokers, who were the indispensable links between production and marketing. The English Company, like its other counterparts, worked through a system of cash advances known as the *dadni* system. This involved a contractual agreement between intermediary merchants and the Company. The former undertook to supply a specific consignment at a specific date; the Company in return paid a certain proportion of the total value of the goods in advance, known as dadni, with the rest being paid on delivery. The merchants underwrote all risks of default by producers and weavers. A broker was appointed by the Company in each factory to oversee the money advanced to dadni merchants. Weavers were thus almost always dependent on intermediaries. Production was generally domestic

and dispersed, with rough and ready tools. There were cases when production extended beyond the family to include others from the same caste group. Skill was a major factor and was valued especially when it came to the production of specified and superior cloth. Thus, levels of organisational development were not static compartments and artisanal production traveled along a continuum.

Bengal assumed a central position in the interregional trade of eighteenth century India. As mentioned earlier, the low cost of water transport was an important factor in Bengal's commercial prosperity. A substantial part of her inter-regional trade in cheap bulk goods was carried over water and even cross-country trade routes in expensive items used water routes. The main route was the Ganges, linking Rajmahal and Allahabad via Patna and Banaras. Below Rajmahal, goods moved to and from places like Malda, Dacca and Hugli along the tributaries and distributaries. In northern India, the Jamuna linked Allahabad and Agra and other distributaries linked smaller ports. Overland routes from Agra to Patna flowed with the rivers—hugging the northern bank between Allahabad and Banaras. Between Banaras and Patna, the route moved south across the Son and then north again, forming a triangle with the river as one side. Another route across riverine Bengal linked Balasore via Midnapore, Kasimbazar, Rajmahal and Monghyr to Patna. Between Gujarat and north India, two routes linked Surat with Agra through western Rajasthan and the more easterly route passed through Malwa and Khandesh. Major cities along this route included Gwalior, Sironj, Ujjain, Mandi and Burhanpur. The evidence on trade routes suggests an elaborate infrastructure to facilitate growth of an integrated market.

The situation changed very substantially even before Plassey, as the decline of the old arterial trade routes connecting Dacca, Hugli, Agra, Burhanpur and Surat affected the structure of trading activities. The consolidation of regional polities after the 1760s helped in a degree of recovery as trading networks reoriented to the emergence of what Bayly calls cross country trade routes. In Bengal, however, the impact of the Plassey revolution was severe as the Company, with its unlimited political power and dominance over the economy, could now manipulate markets and prices.

Trade in the Aftermath of Plassey

There were two broad sets of changes that characterised the Bengal trading economy after Plassey. Between 1757 and 1793, there was the virtual displacement of Asian shipping as far as the export-import trade was concerned. There was also a marked shift from the west to the east as Southeast Asia and China emerged as the new markets for European enterprise. In 1777, the Far Eastern region absorbed 25 per cent of exports from Calcutta. This became even more pronounced after the 1780s when the Calcutta-Canton trade became a spectacular 'British creation to serve a British need'.

For the moment, there were two immediate changes as far as the Company's official trade was concerned, both of which had important implications for the economy. The Company's official trade registered a huge increase—the value of the Company's exports from India grew from Rs 3.5 million in 1758–59 to Rs 4.04 million in 1766. Between 1780 and 1805, the average value of its investment in cost price went up to over 10 million rupees. The benefits of this export boom were, however, neutralised by the changes in the financing procedures of the textile investment as well as by the controls enforced on the organisation and processes of production.

As far as private trade was concerned after Plassey, this passed through two phases. Immediately after Plassey, there were 12 to 15 years of very high profits as traders invaded and eventually controlled certain trades, which had been subject to regulation under the Bengal Nawabs. These profits were made by unfair methods as violence and intimidation was used to commercial advantage—as Mir Kasim had lamented, 'every village and district in that province was ruined by their hands'. But this situation did not last forever, as the Company authorities felt compelled to introduce a measure of regulation. Thus

Principal Settlements

The three principal settlements of the English East India Company in India were Madras (founded in 1640), Bombay (1661) and Calcutta (1690). There were additional subsidiary settlements and factories like for example, Surat, Hugli, Agra, Broach and Cambay some of which were closed down.

after 1770, we enter a new phase when private traders came under pressure from the company authorities and had to create opportunities for themselves, requiring introduction of new skills and commitment of fixed capital in new plants like silk filatures or indigo vats. It was in these circumstances that partnerships of two or three Englishmen with trading capital emerged as forerunners of later Agency Houses. A Society of Trade was set up that imposed restrictions on private traders, and by the 1780s the Company servants were debarred from private trade operations altogether, thanks to the regulations of Cornwallis. But by this time the old trading system had suffered such erosion that any likelihood of revival was impossible. Indian merchants reduced to being dependent partners reinvented themselves in the capacity of brokers or *banians* and played a distinctly subordinate role in the emerging structure.

Banian

Banian was the name given to an Indian agent of the East India Company, who was in charge of information gathering, of securing capital for investment and of marketing. He received a commission for the same. Banian is not the same as bania, a term indicating a particular caste generally engaged in a range of trade and money related functions.

As mentioned earlier, the Company no longer needed to import bullion in the aftermath of Plassey as far as its commercial projects were concerned. It relied on the valuable presents it received from successive puppet rulers and, after 1765, could plough back the diwani revenues into its trading ventures. The Company was also able to exploit its political position to seek exemption from all duties on all articles of trade. Secondly, the Company constantly attempted to enter into direct relations with the primary producers and in the process virtually reduced them to the status of bonded labour. Almost immediately, the Company shifted from the dadni system to an agency system employing salaried Indian employees or gomastas, even as the total volume of investment went up substantially to 6 million rupees in 1767and to 10 million in 1777. This was further modified in order to ensure its annual investment and also to eliminate all possible buyers from the market. We shall look at the process and its implications in some detail.

The changes in the method of financing, from the dadni system to the gomastas and the removal of all competition, had serious consequences especially on the textile industry and the artisans. The

late 1770s and 80s saw indenture or *khatbandi* regulations binding artisans to sell exclusively to the Company, and denying them any improvement in their bargaining position. Thus bullying and harassment by gomasthas and informal coercion in the 1760s and 70s was followed by the elaborate sanctions system of the 1770s and 80s in the form of the Regulations of 1782, 1786, 1787 and 1789. Implicit in the new Agency system was more than a concern for securing investment at favorable prices—it was to establish direct links with primary producers. To achieve this, a new bureaucratic establishment called the Commercial Board was set up with the Commercial Resident heading it. At the level of the factory, the selection of cotton piece-goods was done by the *jachandar*. Between factory and producers the gomastas were the main link but at the actual production centre or *aurang*, there was an elaborate hierarchy of officials—*mukhim*, *muhurir*, *dihidar*, *tagdidar*, cashier and peon who controlled all aspects of cloth investment from issuing orders to dispensing advances, supervising looms and receiving the finished produce. All these arrangements did not always ensure satisfactory delivery, with the result that pressures on weavers continued to be mounted. Weavers were made to conform to the Company's targets by constant threats of withdrawal of orders while simultaneously advances became instruments of manipulation. Under the new system, advances were made through gomastas in equal monthly installments. This was not very helpful as yarn could not be purchased at the lowest prices and also because it increased the workload as a result of numerous trips to the marts, or haats as they were called. The scarcity of capital affected production—weavers tended to use inadequate quantities of yarn and had very little inducement to initiate structural improvements.

In an effort to bypass bottlenecks of supply, the Company responded with a series of legislative measures to formalise its relations with the weavers. Clause I of the Regulations of 1775 for instance, enforced legal conditions on return of loans and advances. This basically meant that weavers' indebtedness was exploited and also the new arrangements nullified any advantages that weavers gained through advances. There was thus no short-term scope for savings, which had previously permitted the manufacturer to adjust his supplies

Aurang

A collecting centre for textiles. The Company organised several such collection centres where weavers were assembled and ordered to produce cloth according to specifications.

to the demands of a wide range of customers. In 1786 the Company claimed that their rights over weavers were based on justice. Under Article 9 of the 1786 regulations, each producer was registered at an aurang, and his name, residence and annual account were recorded. More regulations that were passed in the following year formulated codes of behaviour, specified manufacturer's obligations, defined his market relations and established the Company as the employer rather than the purchaser.

The regulations had serious implications. For one, they transformed the legal status of artisans, who were no longer independent price workers. The violation of these regulations became judiciable in court—offences could lead to court summons. These disrupted production schedules and put such pressures as to encourage weavers to undertake clandestine sales to other buyers. Also the marginal rise on textile prices that should have benefited the workmen, were actually absorbed by the hierarchy of officials set up to oversee production. The weavers had to face the brunt of increasing yarn prices so much so that their profits declined quite perceptibly. Towards the turn of the century, the prices offered by the Company could barely provide the weaver with subsistence—legal controls, claims made by the rural agents of the Company and the Company's mode of procurement and structure of exactions provided disincentives for manufacture of cotton textiles. The result was growing indebtedness and pauperisation in this sector. A report to the Board of Trade in the 1790s reflected an overall decrease in the number of looms and weavers in 1786–87 and the redundancy of weavers and their desertion in the 1790s.

Weavers began to react against these oppressive conditions springing from economic pressures supported by a legal administrative apparatus. They adopted various forms of resistance, not only to the authoritarianism of the Company officials but also to the system of appropriation. Resistance varied according to the position of the craftsmen. Dilatory tactics were adopted thus slowing down production. Occasionally even advances were refused. These measures were especially useful when there were visible increases

in demand and a multiplicity of traders appeared in aurangs, like for instance during the years 1775–87. Weavers often combined to organise resistance and the Company retaliated by arresting its ringleaders. The existence of these combinations is not to be mistaken for a strong guild-like organisation that could resist economic and non-economic pressures imposed by the Company. Often they were not combinations of weavers per se, but were mediated by other influential sections and individuals. But the combinations did make procurement difficult and escalated the tension between the Company and the craftsmen, leading to severe pressure and immiseration. Stories of weavers' thumbs being cut off and the exodus of weavers from centers like Dacca reducing it to a ghost town, suggest the severity of the trauma that artisans faced in the tumultuous century of transition.

Monopsony

Monopsony is a form of market with many sellers, but only one buyer, who is in a position to dictate terms to the sellers.

The consequences of the Company's monopsony were predictably serious. Whether or not this was fundamentally responsible for the decline of the textile industry is a matter of debate. Hameeda Hossain argues that it was so, while D. B. Mitra suggests that it was the slackening of demand that undermined the weavers' position. According to D. B. Mitra, the monopsonistic control of the Company was never absolute or comprehensive. There were many reasons for this. The Company failed to eliminate all its European rivals from the textile trade; we have references to French and Dutch traders as well as private traders buying textiles in the open market. Even as late as the 1790s, English agents complained that they could not supply the full quota of textiles. One reason why the monopsony was not effective was the low level of Company prices—private traders and agents of foreign companies offered 15 per cent and in some cases even 40 per cent more than the Company's prices. The Company could not match these prices. They were cash-strapped for most of the time, while any competitive edge they enjoyed was undermined if prices were high. Secondly the costs of war in this period made it difficult to sustain a regular flow of advances. On the other hand, weavers were quick to realise that private traders were not as fussy as the

Company regarding the quality of the consignment and therefore turned in inferior goods and sold them at higher prices.

The argument has some merit. But it does not take away from the main fact of the political hegemony of the Company that was able to use extra economic means to its advantage. There is little doubt that the Company's regime of controls, combined with the volatility of overseas markets had a severe impact on Bengal's trading economy, leaving little room for maneuvre for either merchants or manufacturers. This was even more graphically demonstrated in the second phase of change between 1790 and 1820, when Indian capital and manufacture was more decisively subordinated to European enterprise. As far as actual statistics go, it would appear that between1815–16 and 1832–33, the annual value of Bengal cotton goods exports fell from nearly Rs 1.5 crores to Rs 8 lakhs while the annual value of British imports into India rose sharply from Rs 2 lakhs to Rs 43 lakhs. Yarn imports also went up and as a contemporary observation put it, 'the trifling quantity of piece goods which Bengal still exported is for the most part made from English twist.' There was a frank admission of the virtual decimation of the cotton industry in the Governor-General's report of 1832: 'cotton piece goods, for so many ages the staple manufacture of India seem thus forever lost'.

To sum up then, the changes that early colonial control had introduced, namely the altered mode of financing the investment, the displacement of Indian shipping, the rampant abuse of private trade and the working of the Company's monopsony had serious consequences for the traditional trading economy of Bengal. The disruption of old interregional trade lines—the decline of the Surat-Bengal trade—and the gradual subordination of Bengal to the requirements of the metropolitan economy produced a depressing commercial situation. Indigenous shipping and export-import trade contracted substantially. The centre of financial and trading power lay in Calcutta, whose British business community dominated the external trade of the region. The shift to the east epitomised the new strength of British capital while the political hegemony of the Company starved Bengal of its external bullion supplies. Consequently, the money market was severely affected—

we hear of debased coins in circulation and a marked increase in lending rates pointing to a currency-strapped situation. *Shroffs* or *potedars* tended to survive but at low levels—the higher reaches of the banking business moving to the more prominent banking firms like the Banaras banking house of Gopaldas Manohardas. It is also important to remember that in the internal sectors as well, there was a marked increase of English private trade, which made serious inroads into Banaras and Awadh. This generated a degree of commercial growth, supporting the rise of middle-level towns like Kanpur, Kalpi, and Mirzapore that played vital functions in an emerging proto-colonial economy.

Shroff

Derived from the word *sarraff* meaning banker. Typically these functions were money changing, money assaying and issuing and discounting of hundis or bills of exchange.

Potedar

Small shroff often called *poddar*

The situation took a new turn after the 1780s, when a fully articulated colonial economy began to take shape. Typically a colonised economy is one which provides raw material rather than finished produce to the metropolitan economy, and markets to absorb the finished products of the colonising country. Pre-colonial India was the principal supplier of textiles to markets in Asia and Europe and imported vast quantities of bullion. The colonial conquest changed this completely—bullion supplies were disrupted and India became a supplier of materials like raw cotton, opium and agricultural produce, and after 1800 began to absorb textiles from English mills. This was also a period when English capital flowed into India and began to invest in new commodities that were intended for export markets outside Asia, thereby linking India with a larger global economy. The results of the tie-up were stacked up in favour of England—some merchant groups gained but even those who benefited were subordinate to the presence of European capital. The casualties were of course the producers whose output could barely adjust to the vicissitudes of export markets.

Historians have sought to characterise the changes that emerged in India's trading economy in terms of the 'domination effect'. Francois Perroux defined this idea as something that went beyond a monopoly and that an economic unit exercising it combined

market and non-market means of coercion. Seen from this point of view, it is easy to demonstrate how the Company, especially in the domain of the textile industry in Bengal, attempted to emerge as the biggest single buyer, how it used extra-economic means to curtail supply and also to exclude Indian capital from spheres chosen by the Company. These devices were extended to other sectors as well, with severe consequences especially for the primary producer. Whether it was the indentured *tanti* (weaver) or the *nunia* (salpetre maker) or the *nacaud* (silk winder) or the *molungi* (salt worker), the concomitant of the progress towards monopsony was the deterioration of their income and living standards.

Regional Variants: The Western Indian Experience

As observed earlier, we cannot make a uniform case for the Company's domination of the Indian economy before 1800, and even after that date. While admittedly, the expansion of British private trade in the Indian Ocean in the first quarter of the eighteenth century affected the position of Indian merchants in Mughal ports like Surat and Masulipatam, it would be an exaggeration to assume that the Company's efforts to intervene in local commercial society were either sustained or permanently damaging. However, from the 1740s the Company made a bid to induct themselves into the existing political structure and enter into an alliance with some sections of local commercial society to augment their stakes and safeguard themselves against the local political aspirants. In Surat and Bombay where the Company maintained important establishments, the allies were the bania merchants of the region, many of whom functioned as textile brokers and bankers and who were able to maintain their position, albeit at a low level in the trading economy of the region. The confidence of the European merchants of Bombay and Surat derived from the superior military power the Company had access to in the form of the Bombay marine, a naval force, and which steadily eliminated rival claims over maritime jurisdiction. In 1759, the Company authorities took a momentous step: supported by the city's

bania merchants, they staged a coup d'etat and took over as Surat city's qiladars and with it some political authority that enabled them to interfere in the city's trade structure. Michelguglielmo Torri has argued that the Castle Revolution of 1759 enabled the English private traders—notably the chiefs of Surat and the governors of Bombay, to formalise their monopoly control over the city's trade with the Gulfs of Persia and Arabia. Among the officials engaged in the Gulf trade were W. A. Price, Chief of the Surat factory (1759–62, 1767–69, 1771–74), and Thomas Hodges, Chief of Surat (1762–67) and Governor of Bombay (1767–71). The first stage in the enforcement of the monopoly was in 1759–60, when it was announced that only those Surat ships hired by the English Chief (principally carrying cargoes of textiles) and chartered by him to the city's freight merchants who wished to send goods to the Gulfs, would be allowed to proceed. What this effectively meant was that the ships of the English Chiefs and those of his favorites had exclusive rights to proceed first. Others were not technically prevented from making independent voyages but the Chief had sufficient powers to make this difficult if not impossible. This was a clear infringement on the fair trade practices that the Surat merchants had been used to.

Qiladar

Officer in charge of the Castle in Surat. This Mughal officer shared the responsibility of the city administration with the Mutasaddi.

Castle Revolution

In 1759, the English East India Company attacked Surat Castle and assumed the right to administer the city jointly with the Nawab. The Castle Revolution gave the Company important political benefits.

Before looking at the workings of the monopoly and its consequences, let us briefly recall the configurations of the trading economy in western India on the eve of the Castle Revolution (1759) when the East India Company authorities assumed control of the city. As Mughal India's most exalted port, Surat lay as a nodal centre in a dense trade network that stretched across the subcontinent and drew a variety of trading items into its export trade. The orientation of western India's external trade was the ports in west Asia and east Africa, which were supplied with Indian textiles along with shipments of grain, sugar and spices. The trade of the North European trading companies constituted only one segment in western India's trade, as the bulk of textile production

was absorbed by markets in the Persian Gulf and Red Sea. Sura also commanded an impressive trade with Bengal, exchanging rav cotton for silk that sustained the manufactories in the respectiv regions. An interlocking system of supply merchants and market connected Surat with the manufacturing interior, giving rise t a hierarchy of markets centres and intermediary merchants wh functioned as brokers for the shipper and the export merchant In Surat shippers and export merchants were primarily Muslim (Sunnis and Bohras) and commanded impressive fleets. A shippe generally earned his profits in three ways; he could hire out his shi to more than a single merchant by taking on a cargo of goods o commenda; the ship-owner guaranteeing to pay the shippers th value of the goods (principal) and the agreed ratio of the profit unless the goods were not sold for some reason. Alternatively, th shipowner could become a merchant in his own right by borrowing money on bottomry, the ship itself becoming security for the loan. Finally the ship-owner could borrow at respondentia, wherein the shipowner agreed to sell the goods on board as in commenda brokers and supply merchants were primarily banias (Hindus and Jains and Tarwady Brahmins) while *sarrafs* or bankers were almost always banias who undertook the important functions of money changing, assaying and discounting bills of exchange. These bills, known as hundis, were key instruments in the financing of trade and integrated the trading economy of India and enabled it to function as a cohesive unit.

The premier position of Surat derived largely from its access to an impressive hinterland both within Gujarat as well as a larger hinterland stretching right across Hindustan thanks to the Mughal infrastructure. Within the region there was an impressive and vibrant handloom sector that responded to market demand. Export merchants located in port cities contacted general brokers, who in turn worked through commodity brokers specialising in the supply of specific items. The latter worked through contractors or sub-brokers who were in direct touch with the artisans. Artisans were essentially price workers and technically free to turn their produce to the market, although in fact their indebtedness to the sub-contractors made this difficult. Weaving as an occupation was a caste-based activity—skill

was an important asset and specific communities whose specialisation and expertise in skilled, high quality cloth commanded influence. In fact, the Company's attempts from about the 1780s to control the weavers and bring them under the same regulations as in Bengal yielded very little results. By the time the regulations came into force, the demand for textiles had waned, leaving the Company little incentive to intervene in the production process.

The induction of the Company into the political set up of Surat, as we have seen, brought a number of changes in the trading economy. This coincided with the long-term decline that set in Surat's trade with the gulfs from the 1740s. In the first place it institutionalised the Company's growing control over the city's freight trade. Secondly, it was followed by the Company's attempts to gain greater control over their annual textile investment and to encourage local mercantile migrations into the new city of Bombay. Thirdly, it fostered close links between the Company and a segment of the city's bania community of merchants and bankers whose financial assistance and remittance facilities helped the Bombay Government maintain and expand its political and commercial operations. The bania bankers were able to maintain their credit operations thanks to the reorientation of trade and credit routes in the second half of the eighteenth century and play a key role in sustaining the British expansion in India. The cross-country routes emerged largely in response to political consolidation of regional states in northern and central India and to the annual flows of tribute payments that fed into British, Maratha and other local regimes. The annual movement of tribute payments from Baroda, Ahmedabad, Nagpur, Banaras and Poona, working simultaneously with pilgrimage and internal trade, stimulated commercial exchanges that in turn fed into the expanding trade of the early colonial poles of Bombay and Calcutta.

However in western India, the Company was not in a position to intervene directly in commercial society. There were two reasons for this. First, the political authority of the Company was only partial and second, the importance of local commercial support was such that the Company could ill afford to bypass their interests. Even in the case of the Muslim shippers and traders, the consequences of colonial domination were not as acute as the collapse of the

west Asian markets was. In fact, Torri argues that the Muslims were able to stage a comeback and thanks to the renewed vitality of the region's linkages with west Asia, the old connections were not entirely snapped. Non-Muslim bania merchants fared well both by servicing the Company's transfers as well as by migrating into Bombay and participating in a variety of commercial activities. The robustness of mercantile activity in the region combined with the delayed timing and partial nature of colonial dominion helped its merchants survive British rule better, to which may be added the more cosmopolitan and multi-ethnic fabric of the region's commercial society. This was evident after 1780 when the cotton and opium traffic with China, and in which Indian enterprise matched that of the agency houses and European private traders, catapulted Bombay into the position of the premier financial and commercial emporium of British India.

The Making of a Colonial Economy

The political domination of India by the English East India Company was accompanied by far-reaching changes in its trading structure especially after the 1780s. The Indian trading economy in the first colonial century began to be distinguished principally by a massive fall in the share of indigenous traders in foreign trade, a complete cross over to raw material exports in place of finished goods and a shift to new markets in the Indian Ocean, like China and Southeast Asia. Together these changes helped integrate the Indian economy to a larger world system with its nerve centre in England—equally these changes destroyed traditional structures of business and trade, dispossessing certain groups while enabling others to find new opportunities in the changing scenario. The Company-private trader combine established a clear domination over India's export trade, which even by the end of the eighteenth century had shifted east. The change in direction was also accompanied by a change in commodity composition—textiles giving way to raw cotton and opium.

According to K. N. Chaudhuri, it was from 1800 that India's overseas trade also began to assume a modern character. The

modern-ness of the development is identified with new forms of business organisation, with the opening up of trade on a massive scale, with the linking up of the Indian economy to a larger global one with significant implications. The benefits of the modern came with the downside of the colonial—consequently the implications of commercialisation and of expanding export trade hardly filtered down to the indigenous sectors of the Indian economy. In fact, it is around the set of changes that came with the opening up of the Indian economy that we have some of the most important and major debates of Indian economic history, on the processes of de-industrialisation and the drain of wealth in the nineteenth century. It is important to remember that notwithstanding the introduction of new commercial cash crops, the results were exceedingly lopsided and transformed Bengal, for instance, into a raw material supplier to service British industry. Broadly speaking, India steadily moved from being an exporter of processed goods and an importer of bullion to being an exporter of raw materials and an importer of manufactures. On the one hand, these changes reflected the opening of Indian trade to the British by the removal of internal checks and obstructions, while on the other these revealed the processes of forced integration of the Indian economy to that of Britain.

The making of a colonial economy was the outcome of a complex alliance between an English trading company and the interests of private and free British capital that saw in India enormous potential for profit. Its configurations were determined by the interests of global capital and the requirements of the metropolitan economy and were predicated upon the actual reality of colonial domination. Its genesis lay in the changes that occurred in the development of trade relations between India, China and England. Here tea played a major role. The popularity of tea in England generated a huge demand for this exotic product of China. Britain had nothing to offer in exchange for tea and with the mounting pressure against bullion exports, a new solution had to be sought. The financing of tea imports required an innovative rerouting of Indian produce that enjoyed a demand in the Chinese market. Cotton and opium provided the key to Britain's problems of trade balance. At the same time the triangular trade arrangements seemed to solve the

problems of remittance. Integrating the movement of funds between Britain, India and China through bills of exchange in London, or on the Company's treasuries in India or in Canton, the Company and private traders were assured of regular channels of capital and remittance facilities. Thus, private merchants shipped cotton and opium to China, deposited the proceeds of their traffic into the Company's treasury at Canton and received bills of exchange drawn either in London or in India. The Company had access to treasure that it could invest in the purchase of tea consignments. It was this complex interlocking of financial and commercial interests that shaped India's trading economy and exposed Indian merchants and producers to an altogether new set of circumstances over which they had very little control. The items that now entered India's foreign trade were chiefly raw cotton and opium followed by sugar and indigo. Indigo in particular, as we shall see, became especially crucial staple in supporting the channels of remittance.

The development and expansion of these trades—cotton, opium, indigo—not merely pointed to a change in the commodity composition of the trade but the manner in which it was managed, benefited first and foremost the British private traders. It put extraordinary pressure on the Indian cultivator, and only partially recompensed the Indian merchant who, at least in Bengal, was forced to suffer the consequences of fluctuating and unreliable export markets. So while the figures of expansion of these cash crops appear impressive, their consequences tell a different story.

Thus between 1814 and 1850, four commodities dominated Indian exports—indigo, raw silk, opium and cotton accounted for 56 to 64 per cent of total value. While all four were peasant exports, indigo and raw silk were hybrid cases as these required some processing techniques and which were financed by foreign capital. The circumstances that led to the ascendancy of these commodities demonstrate how colonial domination altered the orientation of the Indian trading economy and how closely it corresponded to the actual requirements of Britain and its trading interests. Let us first take the case of raw cotton and opium. Through the history of these commodities under colonialism, we shall track the changes that Indian trade, business and agricultural production underwent.

Both these commodities were crucial for the tripartite relationship that developed between India, China and Great Britain.

The triangular trading relationship developed, as mentioned before, as a consequence of the growing demand for Chinese tea in Britain and the need to pay for tea imports by commodities that China needed. China, like India, had little use for British produce and the two items that could fare well here were cotton and opium. Opium, it may be remembered, had been exported to China even earlier but on a smaller scale. After 1770 this trend had been reversed with English private traders exporting consignments of opium at high profits. Between 1770 and 1789, exports rose from 1400 chests to 4000 and by the 1860s to 50,000. In 1814–15, its value stood at 1.2 million rupees, in 1834–35, it was 10.8 million and by 1849–50, it was 50.7 million. This expansion arose from the need to finance Chinese tea exports through consignments of opium, which the Company had access to after the acquisition of the diwani. The provinces of Bengal and Bihar were opium-producing regions and traditionally, government had tended to enjoy a monopoly over its production, farming it out to Indian merchants who financed and organised its production. After the 1770s the Company's monopoly became more strictly enforced and it emerged as the single largest supplier of opium. The cultivation of the crop was strictly controlled through an opium board, which fixed acreage and price, and the revenue derived from it was one of the chief sources of government revenue. Exporting it directly to China was difficult—it was contraband—and it was here that the connection with British private and free traders became so important.

By the 1790s and thereafter, there was a steady influx of British free merchants who looked around for an opportunity to invest their capital. They were vocal in denouncing the Company's monopoly and demonstrated considerable initiative in developing new ventures with capital. Additionally there were private traders—ex-Company employees who organised themselves into Agency houses and stepped in to undertake the export-import trade, marketing of import consignments and most importantly the channeling of remittances. The Company found these networks of private trade useful devices in funding their own tea trade, as well as

channeling remittances. It was this combination of circumstances that led to the triangular trade structure that Tan Chung describes as 'Indian opium for the Chinese, Chinese tea for the Britons and British Raj for the Indians'.

The way the system worked was as follows. England imported huge quantities of tea from China, which had to be paid for by either silver or produce that the Chinese desired. Since bullion was an unattractive option, the choice fell on raw cotton and opium—two commodities that were in demand. Raw cotton for some time played a critical role in this developing trade, but after the end of the eighteenth century it was opium from Bihar and then Malwa that was the staple of exchange. At the same time, this traffic interlocked with the channels of remittance that the Company had been encouraging since the 1770s. From 1773 it had been decided that money remitted to Canton for tea purchases had to be provided by private individuals and schemes were thus designed to attract money to canton from Bengal. It became apparent that if bills on London at a reasonable rate of exchange were freely available at Canton, large sums of money would find their way there as Calcutta merchants would use this to transfer their own funds back home. Thus, an Englishman in Bengal wishing to send his fortune home could do it via Canton; he could for instance lend it to a shipowner to buy cargoes for Canton, when the cargo was sold, its proceeds were offered to the Company's agents at Canton in exchange for bills on London. This mode of multilateral remittances solved the Company's financial needs and provided a way for private traders to send their savings back home.

What were the implications of this new structure and its orientation? It would be useful to remember here that even in the case of other commodities like indigo and silk, the intervention of British private trade was an important factor that radically altered the older structures of trade. Raw silk was in great demand in Europe and this encouraged substantial British investment in Bengal. Many of the enterprising free traders set up filatures and introduced innovations. The main advantage of the new method was a mechanism for double crossing and twisting the threads so as to give the silk roundness and a 'good body'. By 1823, the

volume of filature-wound silk was sufficient for the Company to exclude non-filature silk from their exports. These required substantial investments that only Europeans were able to afford and hence filatures were owned by the Company or by private capitalists. Indigo too was cultivated largely at the behest of an external demand and European capital and in the process exposed to uncertainty. What the effects of this were on local artisans we shall discuss later.

To assess the impact of the new colonial trade structure on Indian mercantile society as well as its manufacturing population, we need to keep in mind the striking regional variations. The Bengal experience was quite distinct from that of western India. The same can be said for northern India, where the indirect consequences of the cotton and opium traffic with China produced important consequences for small scale and middle level urbanisation and commercialisation. We also need to keep in mind that the highest levels of the export-import trade were dominated by European merchants, who organised themselves into Agency houses. Although some Indian entrepreneurs like Dwarkanath Tagore were able to enter the business, the pitfalls of an excessively export-driven industry and of being at the receiving end of government apathy were only too obvious. Also the effects of linking up the Indian economy and its agricultural production with the export markets were disastrous for both Indian capital as well as for manufacture

Let us now look at some of the components in the structure of colonial trade in the nineteenth century. The uppermost echelons of the business were in the hands of the British Agency houses while the Bengal Banayans occupied an intermediate position supplying capital and expertise, especially local knowledge. They had emerged in the wake of expanding European private trade in the latter half of the eighteenth century and, from the very beginning were closely associated with their colonial masters. Unlike, as we shall see, in western India, where an important segment of commercial activity remained outside the domains of official European control, business enterprise in Bengal was inextricably tied to European colonial activity and necessarily operated from a position of relative disadvantage.

Agency Houses and Indian Trade

As indicated earlier, the origin of the Agency houses may be ascribed to the initiative and enterprise of British free merchants and Company servants who resigned their positions in the civil and military service to take up commercial pursuits with permission. Attracting deposits that consisted largely of the savings of Company servants, Agency houses were primarily distributors of capital and undertook trade by agency. Certain factors helped in the growth and development of Agency houses. P. J. Marshall has shown how growing difficulties of remittance in the 1770s and 1780s and the prevailing high profit and interest rates in Bengal accounted for accumulation of European capital. The fortune makers did not want the Company to have an accurate sense of their assets and remitted the same in diamonds or else used the channels of other companies, especially the Danish and the Dutch, to supply their trading capital. For instance, it has been estimated that between 1784 and 1786, remittance funds of Rs 15 million were transferred to Europe under the Danish flag—the rest was deposited with the Agency houses to be invested in country trade or in indigo. By the end of the War of American Independence, this had enabled the Agency houses to make country trade their special privilege—a monopoly within the Company monopoly. By the 1790s they had got rid of their competitors (private traders of the Company) thanks to the regulations of Cornwallis. The success of the Agency houses could also be related to the Company's dependence on them for opium and salt contracts as well as remittance of funds to Canton and other Presidencies, or even for public loans and investment. The most important aspect of dependence as we have seen was the China trade—the Agency houses control over opium led to control over remittances and this in turn brought the trade in indigo to the forefront. By 1790 there were fifteen Agency houses in Calcutta controlling country trade, silk, indigo, sugar and opium, not to mention their interest in banking and insurance. Over time there was a smaller collective monopoly developing within the Agency houses that owned or managed 65 per cent of the vessels belonging to the port of Calcutta, all the dockyards used by the ships and the collieries. Before 1830 when the House of Palmer collapsed, the concentration was even greater, thanks to the support that they received from the government in the form of loans. The Palmers for instance managed to get 40 per cent of all the funds lent by the government to all Agency houses in Bengal.

It was after 1813 that the investment of the Agency houses in indigo began to assume serious proportions. Given the growing demand for the blue dye, vast areas in Bengal were put under this crop. European planters extended credit advances to the cultivators and the result was an overproduction not so much in response to demand as to the need for remittance. Consequently a glut occurred in the 1820s, just when Agency houses were experiencing signs of strain. The overinvestment in indigo sucked off capital reserves while the government, after the costly Burmese campaigns, was cash strapped. In 1825, a commercial slump in England depressed the demand for indigo, and, to compensate for lower prices, still more indigo was produced and exported. Bullion imports slackened—a number of Agency houses folded up, some sold off their assets and went back and the entire edifice broke down.

The third phase of Agency house history began in 1834 and lasted until the commercial crisis of 1847. By this time the Agency houses had fallen under two categories—those that emphasised exporting and those whose main business was importing. The exporting houses were involved principally in the production and export of indigo, sugar and silk. These were the debtor houses as the funnel for capital to indigo planters. Their capital came not from retired employees' savings but from government advances, advances from Indian Banayans and funds supplied by importing houses. The latter were formed by British manufacturers who were expected to serve as agents for the sale and distribution of yarn and textiles sent on consignment from Britain. They accumulated capital from sale of their goods and remitted the proceeds to England through bills hypothecated to indigo and other exports. Indians, Banayans as well as banias, were involved in both kinds of houses—Marwari bankers based in Burrabazar provided capital for importing houses, advanced money to dealers in cloth and became

the chief distributors of cloth upcountry. They also speculated in opium both in Patna and in Malwa. Banayans on the other hand were involved with the export houses and for a brief period enjoyed a moment of genuine business success. Thus this phase of Agency house history corresponded to the more mature phase of the colonial economy as the British manufacturers combined to push their produce in India through the Agency houses. British free traders sought to export Indian indigo to solve their problems of remittance and to this end invested not just in technology but also in non-market forms of coercion and in the process exposed vulnerable producers to the disastrous effects of volatile export markets.

This period (1833–47) is associated with managing agencies. The managing agency was a new type of organisation that took shape between 1834 and 1847 and assumed the duties of a managing agent in Calcutta. Other Calcutta Agency houses followed suit and undertook management of joint stock companies in eastern India. By the 1850s, several such agencies developed in Bombay, Madras and Calcutta and worked as local agents of companies in Britain. The managing agency itself came into being when Agency houses developed and acquired the management of companies and ran them as joint stock. They assumed multiple functions: they acted as entrepreneurs in promoting joint stock companies, they provided initial capital and supported the venture before opening its shares to the public, they retained control by purchasing as many shares as possible and they integrated their industries vertically as well as horizontally. The managing agencies saw several enterprising Indian businessmen come to the forefront—Motilal Seal and Dwarkanath Tagore being important instances in point. The house of Carr, Tagore and Company was especially vigorous as it pioneered several important industries and between 1836 and 1846, managed at least 6 joint stock companies and floated the Union Bank. From this one experience, one can well argue that enterprising Indians could and did enter industry and found it possible to invest capital in productive activities. However, the real problem lay in the fact that under the new dispensation, all entrepreneurial activities were subordinated to the import-export bias of the economy and served

only to strengthen the colonial aspects of the relationship between the economies of India and Britain. As Blair Kling observes, almost all the assets of the Union Bank were committed to financing the production of a single export commodity—indigo. To add to this, the government had no regulatory mechanism in place, while the bank suffered from poor management.

For the moment, however, the preeminence of Carr, Tagore and Company and the Union Bank represented the coming of age of Bengali business. One could argue that the colonial economy had some space for indigenous merchants to operate—even in Bengal, educated Bengalis who had cut their teeth in trade and collaboration with the British were able to contemplate investment in business. Men like Dwarkanath belonged to that class, which had served as commercial agents for the English Company, invested in rural estates and saw the possibilities of enterprise as an instrument of national regeneration. For some time, it seemed as though they would succeed until the commercial crisis of 1837 put a stop not only to their hopes but sealed the fate of Bengali enterprise for almost a century.

The two major commercial crises that shook the Agency houses were a direct consequence of over-speculation and the sudden collapse of the export markets. Overproduction of indigo and the sudden contraction of its demand produced a severe crisis in 1830 when the Agency houses collapsed and this brought about a general disruption in the flow of cash and credit. Once the bubble burst in Calcutta, there was a chain reaction as the whole commercial house of cards in Northern India came tumbling down. In 1847 a similar case of over-speculation occurred as almost all the assets of the Union Bank floated by Carr, Tagore and Company were committed to the production of a single export item, namely indigo. The result of this was that when indigo prices slumped owing to conditions of depression in England, there was a universal fall out of European managing agencies and their Indian constituents. Thus while on paper, loans to indigo concerns were dropping, in fact the bank continued to increase its support to indigo cultivators and in the annual reports, directors disguised their loans. This was a dangerous trend as indigo prices dropped steadily after 1840. The more they

declined, the more capital had to be borrowed to keep them in operation, the more indigo had to be contracted for—thus flooding the market. The Union Bank colluded in this charade until 1847, when it no longer became possible to stem the rot. The Bank went into liquidity even as the Agency houses collapsed and government withheld all support.

The collapse of the Union Bank was a watershed for it decisively ended the brief interlude of Bengali enterprise in large-scale business. The two commercial crises demoralised the local community, which now increasingly turned to land and service as avenues of prosperity. Historians have tried to explain this retreat in terms of sociological factors as well as in terms of the appeal land held for Bengalis as a safe investment and a way of life, but in fact the strongest determining factor was the stranglehold colonial power had on large-scale trade and industry. After 1848, commerce and industry were dominated by British capital and their Marwari associates, who enjoyed familial traditions of support and credit and were also more prone to risk taking. As far as the cultivators were concerned, the indigo experience was singularly disastrous. Forced to cultivate the dye by planters who extended credit advances, they could not go back to food production. Accumulating pressures drove them to rebellion in the decades that followed.

In western India, the situation was somewhat different. For one, the British were unable to establish the kind of monopoly over Malwa opium that local Marwari and bania merchants traded in through a series of transit points in Rajasthan, and the port of Daman under the jurisdiction of the Portuguese. Also, local Parsi merchants were major collaborators of the British Agency houses and merchants like Jamsetjee Jeejeebhoy were able to hold their own in the new dispensation. Asiya Siddiqi's work demonstrates how his income derived from a variety of sources, from profits of trade on his own account, the income from hiring freight on his ships, interest on loans to shippers, dividends on shares in marine insurance companies and commission on the sale of his bills of exchange. Below the Parsis were supply merchants who dealt in cotton and opium. Cotton was primarily grown in Gujarat, and

supply merchants were well entrenched in the internal supply network as brokers and bankers and played a key role in supporting the extensive operations of Agency houses in Bombay, like those of Forbes and Fawcett. The traffic in opium was undertaken by Marwari *sahukar*s or bankers, who as Amar Farooqi points out were involved in an extensive traffic, made advances to cultivators, stored the produce and engaged in large-scale speculation. They serviced private traders and large-scale dealers in opium based in Gujarat, Rajasthan and Bombay. Some of the major dealers based in Ujjain were Lakshmichand Panjray, Jadonee Chabeelchand, Bhaidas Gokuldas and Appa Gangadhar. Clearly the workings of the opium trade were not restricted to Europeans and in fact the capital accumulated in the traffic by indigenous businessmen enabled them to invest in industry subsequently.

The exceptionalism of western India where indigenous business seems to have fared better, has been ascribed partly to the delayed timing of colonial penetration and its negotiations with indigenous capital that was able to maintain its own. Western India generally accommodated a more robust set of commercial traditions and enjoyed the benefits of a multi-ethnic and cosmopolitan mercantile society. It was thus not entirely coincidental that it was here that the first modern textile industries emerged and that merchant groups from here were able to move in large numbers and find outlets for investment overseas. Manufacturers too would appear to have been able to deflect the early onslaught of Company regulations. Right through the 1760s and 1770s the Company tried to tighten its control over contract merchants and weavers by inserting more severe penalty clauses for non-performance, but to no avail. After the 1780s when the presence of more rival buyers put pressure on the Company's textile purchases, these efforts became more sustained but these too had little effect. Right through the eighteenth century artisans were able to maintain their own, resisting the Company's regulations and continuing to work for other buyers, forming small groups of dissenting subjects.

This is, however, not to argue that the articulation of the colonial economy with all its accessories—monopsony, non-market controls, stranglehold over export-import trade, the export bias of

all commodity production—did not have appreciable effects on the whole economy. It is important to remember that even the success and resilience of some sections underscored the structural transformation in the economy and set it on a particular path of development, which at its best was asymmetrical. That India's trading profile underwent major changes in terms of commodity composition, direction and business organisation are without doubt. That India lost her primacy as a supplier of textiles and that Britain was able to market its textiles in India is also without doubt. That Indian merchant groups suffered displacement in the shipping sectors and that the imperatives of trade and remittance shaped the colonial economy are facts that need no elaboration. On the flip side, we do have evidence of the resilience and even success of indigenous business enterprise, even if they were vulnerable to the fluctuations of export markets. Consequently, historians are divided on the issue of colonial impact on the subcontinent. The debate came into the public domain as early as the late nineteenth century, when nationalist critiques of British rule stressed the destruction of India's handicrafts and the disruption of the traditional social and economic order under the shattering influence of market forces represented by western capital and mediated by the colonial state. The stagnation of industrial enterprise, the enfeeblement of agriculture and the decline of traditional crafts embodied the inherently exploitative nature of British rule in the nineteenth century.

Subsequent historical scholarship on the pre-colonial economy also critiqued the colonial factor, and argued that the intervention of European control had thwarted capitalist potentialities and the logical progression of the Indian economy. Morris D. Morris (1986) in turn attacked this position and argued that the capacities of the pre-colonial Indian economy were not as significant as they were made out to be and that the British 'did not take over a society that was ripe for an industrial revolution and then frustrate that development'. Further he argued that British imports of cotton did not wipe out the Indian handloom industry and that imports of yarn actually strengthened the competitive position of the indigenous handloom sector, despite the fall in cloth prices. The demand for cloth was elastic and the fall in price led to a movement

down the demand curve. The amount of capital consumed and the vast expansion of British cloth skimmed off the demand, and the handloom weavers were no fewer in number than they were at the beginning of the colonial period. Morris' propositions were not backed by real empirical data and were refuted, particularly by Toru Matsui. Others argued that even if the competitive position of the handloom industry was strengthened by cheap yarn imports, it could not counteract the decline in the Indian spinning industry. Also from the long term point of view, the fall in the price of cloth per piece was greater than the fall in the price of yarn required for one piece of cloth and therefore the remuneration for weaving one piece of cloth was less and adversely affected the productivity of labour for traditional handicrafts. However, Matsui conceded that foreign cloth could not penetrate as effectively as desired and that there was a potential space available for Indian handloom weavers. The argument was further advanced by Bipan Chandra who demonstrated the lack of correspondence between yarn imports and piece-good imports. The ratio of yarn imports to piece-goods imports was in fact very low. The artisan survived only because Lancashire could not penetrate the Indian market fully and British rule was not efficient enough to create the perfect market. Tapan Raychaudhuri also questioned the assumptions of Morris regarding the increase in per capita income as a sound indicator of economic change and of the benign aspects of British rule. Subsequently Amiya Bagchi, in an authoritative article on deindustrialisation in Bihar and Bengal, established on a careful reading of Buchanan Hamilton's report and later census data, the fact of a real decline in the strength of the population attached to manufacture.

It would be reasonable to conclude that while colonial trade in its first flowering generated a degree of opportunities for a range of intermediary mercantile groups, it also introduced some serious structural weaknesses. Admittedly in western India, merchant enterprise expanded and held its own, but even in smaller middle level towns there were intermediary merchants who fared well. Bayly for example suggests that until the 1840s, *gosains* remained key inland merchants in the colonial cotton trade, selling it at Jalaon, Amrawati and Kalpi, and that certain political and ecological developments in

the 1830s and 40s were responsible for the wide spread decay of the trade in Rajasthan and northern India. But even Bayly is quick to point out that British imports of textiles and yarn in the same period wiped out Indian spinning. He also draws attention to the severe agricultural depression that north India entered in the 1830s—a consequence of famine, bullion shortages and ecological pressure. The forcible integration of the Indian peasant economy to the world markets, the operation of coercion by the Company and the private traders it sponsored and the flooding of the Indian markets with British textiles could not but harm the Indian economy. There were reactions to the crisis—if weavers combined and went on a go-slow campaign, then there were incidents of social violence in the countryside—European officials spoke of looting bands in north India and of increasing dacoities. Not all this was explicitly anti-colonial but there was hardly any doubt that the trials of transition and the pressures of a new economy had taken a severe toll on indigenous society.

If the Company spearheaded economic change and regulation with alacrity, the same could not be said of its attitude towards social intervention. Even after the Company became more self-conscious about its responsibility for governance and for looking after the social health of its subjects, it was unwilling to directly intervene in the affairs of Indian society. Yes it could not stand by as an indifferent bystander: it had to deal with several exigencies on the ground: from regulating interracial marriages to understanding customary practices that were from their vantage point unacceptable, to providing the basics of education that would ensure them a steady supply of reasonably literate clerks. All these issues directly tested the Company's ability to grapple with what they saw as Indian tradition and usage and to consider the best possible option in providing their subject peoples with a benign and understanding administration. This required not just pacification, settlement and governance; it also required the building of blocs—the construction of consenting communities who would work on behalf of the colonial state. It was from here that the reforming impulse—educational and social—emanated and whose effects produced the new middle class elites of India.

Social Policy and Religious Reform: The Orientalist Phase

To understand and evaluate the social policy of the English East India Company and to assess its impact on Indian society, it is first of all necessary to identify the broad concerns that informed the policy as well as its epistemic basis. Here there was a direct co-relation between production of local knowledge and social policy. How colonial knowledge was assembled has been an important subject of enquiry among historians. There has been a lively debate over the nature of colonial knowledge, and lying at the heart of the debate are two opposing assessments of the role played by colonised subjects. One position holds that the role played by the subjects was negligible while the other suggests that colonial knowledge was produced through active collaboration. It would appear reasonable to assume that in the first quarter of formal British rule in India, there was a real basis for collaboration as British officials employed Indian pandits and genuinely tried to grapple with Indian society and cultural practices through a mediated understanding of Hindu and Muslim law and social practices. So even though the initial thrust of the Company's educational policy was to train a team of competent civil servants by familiarising and sensitising them to the specificities of Indian culture, there was also a growing interest in the configurations of Indian society. But until the early nineteenth century, the interest remained academic and the Company was loath to interfere in social matters except in a positive way, one which generated a measure of reciprocal interest on the part of the colonised subjects. This particular orientation—one that inspired an important generation of research into India's past and cultural

Social Reform Movements
Prohibition of Sati (1820)
Hindu Widow Remarriage Act (1856)
Founding of the Hindu College in Calcutta (1816)

Religious Reform Movements
Brahmo Samaj (1828)
Swami Narayan sect in Gujarat (1780–1830)
Islamic reformist movements under Shah Waliullah and Abdul Aziz (1746–1824)

traditions is generally known as orientalism in British Indian history. British orientalism (1772–1835) was a unique phenomenon that was inspired by the needs of the East India Company to train a class of British administrators in the languages and culture of India. It began with the coming to power of Warren Hastings (1732–1818), the first and perhaps most famous of the British Governor-Generals of India. Hastings' orientalism had an element of genuine appreciation; as he observed, 'among the natives of India, there are men of strong intellect and sound integrity and with as honorable feelings as any of their kingdom ... by your example make it the fashion among our countrymen to treat them with courtesy and as participators in the same equal rights of society with themselves'. At the same time, he did not see the need to import English laws and customs and burdening the people with them and specifically enjoined that in 'all suits regarding inhabitant, marriage, caste and other religious usages and institutions, the laws of the Koran with respect to Mahomedans and those of the Shaster with respect to Gentoo shall be invariably admitted to, on all such occasions, the Moulvis or Brahmins shall respectively attend to expound the law, and they shall sign the report and assist in passing the decree'. The results of this orientation found concrete expression in the establishment of institutions like the Asiatic Society and the Calcutta Madrassa in Bengal, and the Sanskrit College in Benaras. Under the aegis of these institutions, an impressive corpus of writings on laws, customs and literary texts was published, thus giving a fillip to the emerging orientalist scholarship of the period. The achievements of men like Nathaniel Halhed (encouraged by Hastings to compile a Code of Hindu Law) H. T. Colebrook (1794–1816), William Jones (1784–94), H. H. Wilson (1815–32) and James Prinsep (1832–38) certainly produced an important and abiding impression of a classical age in India's past and cultural traditions.

According to historian David Kopf, orientalists were products of the Enlightenment and were moved by notions of classicism, cosmopolitanism and rationalism. Tolerance and openness to other cultures was an idea that had strong appeal for them. It was therefore, not surprising that they were predisposed to the agenda of administrators like Hastings and even Wellesley, both

of whom took the lead in establishing institutions of learning and training. One important consequence of these new institutions of orientalist learning, like the Fort William College, was the new and expanding networks of literary activity that emerged and brought to the forefront influential native scholars, who responded over time to the new and expanding possibilities of education and later colonial employment. Over time, they emerged as an important new social class that strove to grapple with new questions of liberalism, modernity and rationality and thereby assume a key role in articulating social and religious reform.

New Education, The Literati and the Anglicist Turn

If Hastings was instrumental in developing the orientalist frame for understanding Indian society, then it was Macaulay who jettisoned it in favour of a more pragmatic and explicitly stated project of Western education and moral regeneration. This is not to suggest that the abandonment of orientalist learning for Western scholarship through the medium of the English language was necessarily tied up to the project of social reform and intervention, but merely to make the larger point that by this time, there was a greater confidence on the part of the colonial administration in interfering in social affairs and in running down indigenous institutions and practices. It is also important to remember that not all utilitarians were in favour of Western education; many of them, like James Mill, were in favour of vernacular education just as there was among the indigenous population a growing demand for Western education. In 1813, when the British Parliament directed that one lakh of rupees be spent annually by the English East India Company on the improvement of education and the newly instituted Committee of Public Instruction planned the setting up of a Sanskrit College, Raja Rammohan Roy protested against the move saying that the grant should have been spent on teaching of western science. 'We were filled with sanguine hopes', he wrote 'that this sum would be laid out in employing European

gentlemen of talents and education to instruct the natives of India in mathematics, natural philosophy, chemistry, anatomy and other useful sciences. We now find that the Government are establishing a Sanskrit school under Hindu pandits to impart such knowledge as is already current in India'. The Committee of Public Instruction was actually divided on this issue and only in 1835 did Macaulay's rhetoric prevail and the resolution to impart Western education through the English language was adopted. This was a turning point as Indians were now fully exposed to the influence of English liberal and scientific thought, and in the process brought their own insights into the reforming process.

Education in British India from its inception emerged as an important agent of social change. Even before the formalisation of education under the Committee of Public Instruction, the indigenous service groups—business and otherwise—that flocked to the early colonial cities of Calcutta, Bombay and Madras were influenced by the new dispensation—with its modes of adjudication and by its education cum administrative institutions, the college at Fort William being an instance in point. In all the three cities where there was a designated Black and White town, intended for white and non-white residents respectively, there were courts that mediated disputes and brought the city's residents into a new ambit of negotiation and experience. The advantages of British justice were not lost on the merchants who approached the Mayors' courts in increasing numbers. Added to this were the influence of missionary enterprise and their publication initiatives, some sponsored by the Company, but almost all being able to stimulate thought among local intelligentsia. This was as true in Madras as it was in Bengal where missionary enterprise in the fields of publication and education were very remarkable, and encouraged local notables to press for large scale educational reform. In this, the Protestant missionaries in Madras and the Serampore missionaries in Bengal were especially important. The Serampore mission headed by Carey, Marshman and Ward took the lead in translating the Bible into local languages and ran schools, even if only on a limited scale. David Hare followed this up by establishing a school with English as the medium of instruction while the Calcutta

School Society and the Calcutta School Book Society began to promote vernacular schools for elementary education. The aim of the Calcutta School Society was to provide education beyond what was instituted by the government and it was clear that by this time there was emerging in the cities especially Calcutta, a distinct swathe of opinion about education. This reflected two things; one the emergence of a class that saw its life in the city and its espousal of education as an important asset in social terms and secondly, a polarisation of opinion between those who espoused vernacular education and those who opted for Western education. As Kopf puts it, 'the older generation of intellectuals who had been reared by Orientalist contact shifted to a "native" position'.

The tide turned in 1835 with the famous Macaulay Minute. Thomas Babington Macaulay, who had come to India the previous year as Law member, was also appointed the President of the General Committee of Public Instruction. On 2 February 1835, he issued his famous Minute that became the basis for the introduction of English education in India. Contemptuously dismissing the 'so-called treasures of Oriental civilisation', he made a strong plea for Western education, European literature and sciences in the English language. Whether this was intended to genuinely create a new disposition and approach to scholarship is debatable—what Macaulay had in mind and what he professed openly was to create a dependent class of subordinates with English tastes and who would be content in replicating the knowledge that was produced in the metropolitan country. There was no question of any interest in primary education—rather the intention was to allow its filtration downward from the men of business to the masses. Once this was achieved, then Indian society could benefit from Western knowledge and institutions and adopt a more desirable set of ethical and moral ideals. The instrumentality of education was thus not in doubt—it was an essential pre-condition to the adoption of a comprehensive programme of social and religious reform. For the subjects, this shift was extremely significant as it triggered important responses among the intelligentsia about social and religious reform. In experiencing a new education, the intelligentsia was able to reflect on tradition, religion and society and in the process embark upon

a project, which in most cases was highly individuated. As Rajat Ray points out in his introduction to a volume on Rammohan Roy, social reform movements led by Rammohan Roy and his disciples meant the transformation of individual lives in the direction of rational and humane standards of belief and behaviour.

This brings us to the question of the new literati in the colonial cities and how they responded to these developments. Our analysis will be largely Bengal-centric but we will have occasion to comment on the developments in the other cities of Madras and Bombay respectively. The colonial cities as we know developed as major centers of power, trade and administration from about the middle of the eighteenth century, attracting local and regional migrants. Most of the early settlers, who were persuaded by the Company to settle down and take up residence were merchants, manufacturers and service providers and were assigned residential space in what came to be known as the Black Town. The late eighteenth century saw more substantial migration, which was also different in terms of community profile—in Bombay we have references to traders from Cutch and Kathiawar flocking in large numbers, as well as Parsis. In Madras from the early nineteenth century, there was a slow migration of literate high castes (Brahmins in particular) who came from the districts of Trichinopoloy, Tanjore and Tirunelveli seeking colonial education and later on colonial employment. Until then the indigenous population of Madras had a substantial commercial component—commercial castes were prominent and made full use of the Company's protection as well as its system of adjudication. The extent to which this altered their social outlook and priorities is debatable—their continued investment in older modes of consumption like seeking honours, taking the lead in building temples or organising processions would appear to reflect an older preoccupation with tradition. In Bombay on the other hand, the indigenous commercial population would appear to have more successfully embedded themselves in the city's social fabric, which was more mixed and even cosmopolitan. The 'native' city here had a more urban character than Calcutta. Here social formations were determined by the requirements of early trade that brought in its train merchants, artisans and procurers, but subsequently by British

policy and the by the consequences of the Permanent Settlement. The Company's orientalist policy held out important prospects for local linguists and literati, who found employment in the new city and the institutions that the colonial administration created. These men were mostly upper castes who had traditionally enjoyed access to education and scriptural knowledge and whose knowledge of Persian as an administrative language enabled them to make a quick crossover. For example, we have the case of Ram Kamal Sen who was one of the earliest members of the Asiatic Society, well versed in English, besides his knowledge of Persian and Sanskrit and which enabled him to find employment in the colonial administration. There were others like him who formed the nucleus of a new social class—the *bhadralok*—which included traders working with the British and professionals. The origins of this class are also to be located in the ranks of the smaller local gentry who consolidated their position on land after the Permanent Settlement. The earliest and best example of this was Rammohan Roy himself, who after having acquired a substantial landed property in Burdwan during his service under Digby in Rangpur, moved to Calcutta permanently in 1815 in order to lead an intellectual life. This class came under the influence of Christian missionary activity, of printing networks sponsored under the larger orientalist project and the result was an important mental transformation. Not only did a few conversions take place, there was a simultaneous pressure on the Hindu gentry to conceptualise their own understanding of tradition and religion and thereby to respond to the missionary critique of the Hindu religion. At the same time, there was a growing fascination for Western education—a development that found concrete expression in the establishment of Hindu College in Calcutta in 1817. This was a modern educational initiative, undertaken by affluent Calcutta Hindu families who wanted their sons educated in the Western tradition. The fact that the establishment of such an institution predated the audacious Macaulay Minute and coexisted with government-sponsored Sanskrit College speaks of a rich and dynamic environment where there was a genuine cross-fertilisation of ideas and experiments and excitement. The origins of the college are somewhat obscure—one view is that it was the brainchild of

David Hare (1775–1842) a close friend of Rammohan and that it was first mooted at meeting of Roy's friends in his house. The view has some takers and lots of detractors but whatever be its origins, the development spoke of a particular moment in the social history of the new middle class in Calcutta. The college rapidly became an extremely important institution not just in terms of enrollment but in terms of the social transformation it was able to produce and support. Constituting this transformation was the growing fascination with European ideas of liberty, representation and freedom, conveyed through a line of remarkable teachers of whom Henry Louis Vivian Derozio was one. Not only did this fundamentally alter the world view of Hindu College students forcing them to embark in all sorts of individual and collective ways, on a retrospective exercise of tradition, religion and social practice, the college experience held out deeply personal possibilities of friendship, collegiality and shared affective experiences that went a long way in producing a cohesive bhadralok urban sensibility. Thus, the outcome of the new college was successive batches of students who were unafraid of expressing their opinions about religion, Hinduism and its practices and speaking in favour of liberal education. As radical thinkers, they formed the Young Bengal movement and by their individual actions provoked outrage among the conservative sections of Hindu society. Some among them refused to wear the sacred thread, others eschewed practices they found irrational, yet others abandoned their homes but all of them represented a particularly heady moment in the history of Calcutta. The movement fizzled out but its legacy was not unimpressive as it facilitated what Subrata Dasgupta characterises as cognitive creativity and cross-cultural mentality.

Yet another response to the social changes that the city of Calcutta underwent in the early nineteenth century lay in a more concerted project of intellectual thought on religion and social practice from the vantage point of rationality and Enlightenment values. This engagement by sections of the Bengali elite is generally understood to have amounted to a renaissance or intellectual flowering, wherein the figure of Raja Rammohan Roy is central.

Raja Rammohan Roy and the Bengal Renaissance

The profound transformation that Western education had on sections of the literati in Calcutta found expression in myriad and complex ways that ranged from individual and personal transformations to organisational initiatives to revalidate Indian social practices or the Hindu religion, from prose practices to new modes of feeling and expression, and has been seen as a major benchmark in the social history of Bengal. The experience was referred to as the awakening (*nabajagaran*) a renaissance both among contemporaries and retrospective reflections. More recent scholarship has tended to debunk the movement, critiqued its elitist bias and dismissed it as a 'sign of false consciousness'. Before referring to this debate let us briefly recall the achievements and importance of Raja Rammohan Roy, whose lifetime saw an important piece of social reform legislation, a growing preference for Western education and the articulation of what Kenneth Jones calls an acculturative Hindu movement.

The Brahmo Samaj and its Leaders

Raja Rammohun Roy (1772–1832)
Raja Debendranath Tagore (1817–1905)
Kesab Chandra Sen
Bijoy Krishna Goswami

Born into a world of rich and diverse cultural inputs, Raja Rammohan Roy was from his youth of a curious and inquisitive temperament with an aptitude for languages. His reservations about idolatry and polytheism were evident in the famous tract *Tuhfat-al-Muwahiddin* that he published in 1804, making public his denunciation of idolatry and polytheism. Rammohan's move to Calcutta where he had a stint in private banking and entered into close associations with Europeans, exposed him to a wider circle of philosophical influences, urging him to re-conceptualise and reformulate the basis of Hinduism. Deeply inspired by Unitarianism, he adopted the comparative religious method to sketch the basic outlines of his reconstituted Hindu religion. For him, it was necessary to go back not to priests but to the purist form of the scriptures as enshrined in Vedanta. He rejected missionary claims to superiority and argued that Christianity was laced with superstitions, although its ethical dimensions made it a profound

source of inspiration. What was striking about Rammohan's approach was his advocacy of argumentation to validate the tenets of the reconstituted Hindu religion and his openness to all faiths that seemed to converge on certain universal ideals and principles. The atmosphere of debate and discussion when Hindu society in Calcutta was responding to the stimulus of so many challenges was evident in the way Rammohan argued and also in the way his detractors retaliated. It was this dialectic that gave the social experience of the times a particular flavour—whether it was limited or redundant or even completely ineffective as far as the larger social constituency was concerned are questions that cannot take away from the excitement of the times.

In 1815, in an attempt to establish the organisational basis for his ideas, Roy sponsored the Atmiya Sabha, which held weekly meetings at his residence, where members recited scriptures, sang hymns and held discussions on religious and social issues. Nine years later Roy established the Brahmo Samaj that met for the first time in August 1818. It conducted religious services that consisted of selections from the Upanishads extolling the presence and aura of the Supreme Being—the benign superintendent of the universe. The idea behind the Samaj was to create a community of believers who were rationally disposed to the omniscience of the Supreme Being and who rejected all forms of superstition, idolatry and sacrifices, and who upheld egalitarianism. As it happened the most of the new members of the Samaj were high caste brahmins. It faded into oblivion after Rammohan's death and was revived by Dwarkanath Tagore in the 1830s when he established the Tattvabodhini Sabha and subsequently revived and expanded the Brahmo Samaj. Under his leadership it expanded into the cities of eastern Bengal and held a special appeal for younger men like Keshab Chandra Sen.

The most dramatic event associated with Rammohan's career and one that directly engaged with social reform in the public domain was the campaign against the rite of sati. Although the practice was not widely practiced everywhere in India, there were cases of its observance, especially in parts of Bengal. The practice generated a great deal of anxiety from the magistrates, Christian

missionaries and abolitionist like Rammohan Roy, and brought the issue into the public domain. In fact the sati issue became one of the earliest and most important sites of the new social reform movement that the Company attempted in cooperation with liberals like Rammohan. However, he was cautious enough to frame his discourse against sati abolition within the template of tradition and pure, uncorrupted scriptures and in doing so echoed the older colonial discourse on sati. As Lata Mani has argued, there were many points in which the colonial, missionary, reformist and Hindu revivalist discourses converged and the actual issue at debate was not so much a secular defense of women's rights and her body but a debate on what constituted the right tradition and where its sources of legitimacy lay. Hereafter, texts as a secure basis for reform would become a continuing feature of social movements. Rammohan's position was challenged by orthodox men like Radhakanta Deb, who founded the Hindu Dharma Sabha and who argued against the colonial state's interference in Indian familial and domestic practices. The constant need to validate the right tradition, to balance the right tradition with the desired modern practice became a recurrent feature of Indian intellectual response to the colonial challenge in the subsequent decades.

What is important to note is how liberal opinion embodied by Rammohan and his colleagues like Dwarkanath was informed by their proximity to British free traders and the liberal ideology they espoused. Both of them endorsed the introduction of Western education, anticipating the Macaulay Minute, which was to have profound social consequences. The production of colonial knowledge about Indian society, the existential anxiety about tradition that ideas of modernity and Western education generated were important features in the social history of India in the first century of colonial rule. Admittedly, the effects of this social and epistemological transformation were confined to the bhadralok or the middle class—indeed, the narrow basis of the Bengal Renaissance has been the basis of most critiques of the phenomenon. Sumit Sarkar argued that the so-called break with the past that Rammohan embodied was limited, the renaissance culture which he initiated was a Hindu elitist and comprador one

and that the contradictions within his thought could ultimately be traced to the basic nature of British impact on Indian society. He was, in the final analysis, a purveyor of half fulfilled bourgeois modernity. Rajat Ray on the other hand suggests that there was a sharp break in nineteenth century Bengal and that in spite of all the inner tensions and contradictions, there was a noticeably new orientation in mentality and culture.

Developments in Bombay and Madras

Here too education emerged as the principal catalyst in forming an urban intelligentsia that was drawn to Western education and thereafter reflected on their religion, tradition and practice. Interestingly as Christine Dobbin has pointed out, it was not the *shetias*, the commercial elite of Bombay city who responded eagerly to Western education, but Maharashtrian Brahmins who migrated in the nineteenth century. The colonial administration was initially very cautious about social intervention and restricted their education efforts to their own community. In 1815 the Bombay Education Society was established to educate European children in the city and this inspired the setting up of the Native Education Society to improve existing schools and to establish new ones. In 1825 the Elphinstone Institute was established which became a college subsequently, and became for the city's elite what Hindu College was for the Calcutta bhadralok. What characterised the students was a marked preference for associational activity and debates on social, religious and scientific issues. Similar trends towards Western education appeared in Poona, and by the mid-nineteenth century, both cities were throwing up young Western-educated brahmin graduates. Parsis were another community that took to Western education and also invoked in the process their ideal of a pure Zoroastrian religion.

In understanding the renewed appeal of tradition among the colonial subjects of Bombay, the importance of missionary activity cannot be underestimated. In fact between 1839 and 1843 the subject of Christian missionaries and conversions became quite

volatile and Parsis and Hindus took Christian missionaries to court and demanded the return of abducted children. More than that, the missionary propaganda forced Indians to look into their own traditions—here the principal figure was the Scottish missionary John Wilson, for whom the education of and debate with Indians on religion was essential to the successful adoption of Christianity.

Missionary influence and Western education thus became critical agents in setting the parameters for a new public sphere for the colonial subjects of Bombay. Even as Indians wished to send their children to English-medium schools, they were not well disposed to missionary-run schools and tended to keep their wards in either government-run ones or in the schools they set up. In 1849 Jamsetjee Jeejeebhoy started his school (Parsi Benevolent Institution) modeled on Western lines, while Hindus began to debate questions of conversion and the Hindu religion even more stridently. Many of the debates tended to be around the issues of readmission into the Hindu fold after conversion. What seems apparent in the Bombay case is the evident appeal that Western education held for the middle class and the renewed urgency in maintaining and upholding their traditions.

In Madras, the nucleus of its specific variety of orientalism was the Fort St George College, established in 1812. It employed several influential pandits and helped in the creation of a new literary culture. The early pandits were drawn from Vellalar castes, known for their proficiency in Tamil. Education was, however, a missionary preserve and its progress was slow and limited—high castes being loath to send their children to these places. In 1823 the government formed the Committee of Public Instruction to plan for the opening of non-missionary schools. Finally in 1834, the Hindu Literary School opened its own English school to teach children of respectable families. As in Bombay, there was a great deal of consternation over missionary propaganda, and in 1839 a petition demanding the establishment of an English college in Madras with 70,000 signatures was presented to the government. This petition stated its opposition to missionary schools and demanded more government action for education. By this time, the social demography of the city accommodated not just trading

castes that had been influential as *dubash*es (interpreters), but Vellala pandits as well as brahmins migrants from the districts of Tanjore, Tirunelveli and Trichinopoly, who sought employment in the colonial administration. This became conspicuous in the 1850s when government took steps to expand education. Until then the requirements were broadly met by the Pachaiyappa School and Madras High School, whose enrollment figures, however, remained unimpressive. In fact the stirrings of reform and regeneration appear to have come rather late in Madras—after the Mutiny, when the Brahmo Samaj established its branches and other social reform associations came up. This is not to say that important religious figures did not live and preach in Madras—we have the example of Ramalinga Swami (1823–74) a secular radical saint whose egalitarianism and ideas of universal selfhood were apparently unmediated by the early colonial impact.

The Muslim Response

So far we have concentrated on the overall social transformation of sections in the Hindu community and the ways in which it responded to the challenges and workings of the colonial regime. We shall now look at the impact of the colonial milieu on Muslims, especially in the North Western Provinces, Bihar and Awadh, where there was a visible urbanised literate Muslim segment that absorbed Western education. This is evident when we look at an institution like the Delhi College, which was founded in the 1820s, combining a madrasa and a new college that taught English. This college, as Gail Minault has argued, was part of a complex of literary and intellectual currents prevalent in Delhi at that time. The Delhi Committee of Public Instruction debated on the possibilities of reviving the practically defunct madrassa of Ghaziuddin Khan and raised funds to start extra classes in English, astronomy and mathematics on European principles. This brought together two traditions of learning,which found a keen response among the local elite. Very soon it developed an enormous reputation that spoke of certain possibilities, albeit for a short while. Urdu was the mediating

language between two different curricula and what was striking about the college was the lack of anxiety among the Muslim elite about Western education. As a result it did not fall into the trap of having to be either anglicist or orientalist but in fact it could stand forth an arena of genuine dialogue. Among its leading lights was Ramachandra, a *kayastha* maths professor who wrote an original treatise on algebra in Urdu and gave in his writing in *Muhibb-e-Hind*, evidence of a voracious intellect. His stint in the college and his influence seemed to capture a moment of heady excitement with the new learning that we so often associate with a figure like Derozio. The moment was, however, brief and the brutality of 1857 put paid to a genuine reconciliation with the colonial encounter.

Elsewhere, other kinds of movements surfaced and took a more unequivocal stand in favour of a purer Islam. There was the Tariqah-i-Muhammadiyah founded by the charismatic Saiyid Ahmad Barelwi (1786–1831), who dreamed of recreating an Islamic state. He stood for a purer Islam and rejected all customs and rituals from Indian, Roman and Persian civilisations unless they were consistent with the Quran and Sunnah. He sought inspiration from Shah Waliullah but departed from the latter's precepts in one important difference, namely in his emphasis on jihad against non-Muslims. He denounced the British territory as unlawful and fought against the Sikhs in the Punjab. Throughout the 1820s, he preached throughout the Gangetic plain, drawing supporters from among depressed Muslim weavers and artisans. In 1829 he even set out to establish a state of his own by hitting out against the Sikh state of Ranjit Singh, but with little success. The movement floundered after his death but under the leadership of the Ali brothers who had been his disciples, the movement continued for a while until British reprisal measures put paid to this initiative. In one sense the movement may be said to have represented the deep anxieties of the community that had suffered dislocation in the time of transition as it aimed at restoring the political dominance of Islam.

No account of social change in the first century of colonial rule will be complete without mention of the great transport revolution that the Company sponsored in the form of the railways and of the huge expansion of print networks that its educational policy

fostered. Both these instruments of communication worked towards producing linkages that went a long way towards developing a cohesive sense of identity. To facilitate rule and education, the Company resorted to printing. To make possible proselytisation, missionaries resorted to the printing press and the result was an enormous network of cheap and accessible communication. Print became the agent of modernity and rationality even as it helped access authenticity of tradition. Print publishers became the forerunners of public organisations everywhere, especially in the second half of the nineteenth century. Railways, on the other hand, produced a very different kind of inter-connectedness—for Lord Dalhousie they held immense possibilities for dissolving old prejudices. However, the most immediate cause for the construction of the railway network was to facilitate the movement of goods during war, as well as facilitating inland trade that was oriented to the export-import trade of free merchants. It was thus designed to connect the main centres of agricultural production with the great ports. By the turn of the century, India had a rail network of 25,000 miles and 46 million tones of freight.

Thus, by the end of the first century of colonial rule, Indian society and economy had accommodated a number of substantial changes. The changes affected both rural and urban sections of the population even though it was the latter that enjoyed the benefits of colonial education more frontally. It was in the cities that a colonial bourgeois elite emerged with all its limitations and contradictions, and internalised the hegemonic colonial discourse. This is not to put down or debunk their engagement with modernity and with ideas of rationality and civil liberties that Western education gave them access to, but to merely see their actions and anxieties, contradictions and contributions in the right perspective. The changes in the trading and agricultural economy were profound, integrating India with the larger global economy and thereby exposing it to the perils of fluctuating demand. Some groups were able to retain and even expand their functions under the new dispensation, but many became casualties under the new structure of production relations. The state of the ordinary cultivator was especially pitiable as he faced the unrelenting pressure of revenue demands and forced cultivation of commercial

crops. Older bands of soldiers and retainers lost their employment as well as their prestige. The benefits of peace and administration, of the rule of law and education did not entirely make sense to vast sections of the rural populace in northern India, where the politics of transition increased social violence. Even if in some rural areas, as Frykenberg has argued, the actuality of British control did not alter the social status quo as fundamentally as it seemed to, there was a perceptible change in the regime and which could not but make an impact on varied segments of the population. Some of these segments took up the baton of protest, others looked to older forms of legitimacy that they invoked during their moments of defiance. While it would be far-fetched to invest these elements of resistance with ideas of patriotism or early nationalist consciousness, there is little reason to question the alienation that many segments faced in the first century of colonial rule. Some of these collapsed into the great Mutiny of 1857 and it is to these elements of resistance and protest that we shall now turn our attention.

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Chapter 5

Resistance and the Great Rebellion of 1857

The process of colonial domination and pacification brought in its train far reaching changes that affected substantial sections of Indian society. At a very basic level, the wars that were fought in course of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries demonstrated the resistance offered by the regional power holders in India. This was especially evident in the opposition of the Maratha confederate chiefs, the Mysore rulers Haider Ali and Tipu Sultan and the dal khalsa of the Sikhs. Even in the case of the Mughal nobility, where resistance was not marked, there were some moments of dissent when an ideology of protest was articulated. The wars fought by Mir Qasim for example, revealed his growing reservations against the Company's exploitation that had ruined peasant and trader alike. As he mentioned to Henry Vansittart, 'the English gentlemen had set up a trade in salt, tobacco, dried fish, timbers, and other necessaries, which they purchased from the country people with force and extortion so that the poor, the inhabitants, merchants and manufacturers of my country are oppressed'. According to Rajat Ray, the expressions 'my country' and 'the poor' constituted a new language indicating the sense of disempowerment suffered by the ruling class and the newly felt need to invoke a popular basis for Mughal rule. Whether or not this language constituted an early version of patriotic consciousness, elements of which surfaced in the great rebellion of 1857 is debatable, but it would do to examine the several moments in the articulation of resistance at

multiple levels against Company hegemony. This came from widely different quarters and assumed different manifestations until 1857, when several dispersed elements came together in parts of northern and central India to mount the first serious challenge to British dominion. This is, however, not to draw a clear line of continuity from one uprising to another but to reflect on the alienation that certain sections of agrarian and political society underwent in the first century of colonial rule, and how in 1857 a series of flashpoints enabled the resistance to cohere into a large scale uprising.

The nature and severity of transformation, especially in agrarian society, was related to two major developments. The first was the British land settlements and escalating revenue demands that had two kinds of consequences affecting both the poor as well as older landed magnates and elites, and the second was the political displacement of the old ruling aristocracy that removed at one stroke their armed retainers and the way of life they were used to. Even here the differential nature of the impact on different groups is important and as Stokes has demonstrated in his study of the 1857 mutiny, no longer can anyone assert that 'the Brahmin challenged by a new educational system, the aristocrat deprived of his ancestral lands, the prince shorn of his state all readily joined together to over throw the British state'. However, that British rule from its very inception destabilised local society and generated even armed responses was evident. For example in Bengal, where colonial penetration came early and brutally, there was a spate of zamindari uprisings that coincided with popular violence. The coercion and rapacity of private traders whose operations undermined the well being of manufacturers and artisans and even local trading networks like the *sannyasi*s, while the magnates were brought into the anti-British alliance that Mir Qasim forged on the eve of Buxar. In 1764, even as the fakirs attacked the English factory at Dacca, the zamindars participated in the siege of other English factories in the countryside. We have references to the diwan of Rani Bhavani of Rajshahi intercepting English consignments of silk, and to the zamindar of Baboopur taking up arms against the English factory in Lakhipur. Rajat Ray is of the opinion that the social alliance that Mir Qasim was able to build reflected the sentiments of an

all-India Mughal ruling class cemented by an ideology of Mughal restoration. This anti-Company alliance did not involve the popular elements in any significant manner, although later and in the decades following Buxar, it was popular resistance against the early colonial dispensation that underlined the first severity of the experience in Bengal.

Peasant, Monk and Warrior: Resisting the Company 1765–1830

Agrarian resistance from Bengal to Malabar was primarily an outcome of the severe destabilisation that British rule and land settlements produced. The enforcement of new settlement policies and administrative reform had depended upon certain sections of landed society, some new groups whom the English created and other older ones who fitted into the new dispensation. Either way, it was inevitable that the new rulers and their collaborators would face the antagonism of the cultivators and peasants on whom the brunt of the land revenue demand fell. The latter on their part, took recourse to resistance, even violent resistance and fell back, as did the uprising of Titu Mir, on religion as a framing ideology of protest. Occasionally they combined with other recalcitrant elements like as in the case of the Sannyasi and Fakir rebellions where one could not always detect an identity of 'class interests'.

The material context for both the initial peasant uprisings in Bengal as well as for the uprisings referred to as the sannyasi and Madari fakir disturbances was the burden of a rising revenue assessment on the peasants, enforced through the chosen zamindars and revenue farmers, and the clash between the Company's mode of governance and the older moral and political economy. The main thrust of the Company's agenda after the acquisition of the diwani was to enhance the land revenue in Bengal; in fact between 1765 and 1784, revenue collections increased very substantially. This was made possible largely through different experiments, some of which involved replacement of old intermediary collectors by new ones, who were often ruthless. The burden thus fell on the hapless ryot

Rebellions before 1857
Sannyasi and Fakir uprisings in Bengal (1763–1800)
Tariqah-i-Muhamaddiya under Titu Mir
Faraizi movements in Bengal under Shariatullah and Dadu Mian (1840–1859)
Mappillas in Malabar
Santhal Hool (1855–56)

whose insurgency became a recurrent feature of the agrarian history of Bengal. One of the earliest and most significant uprisings was the Rangpur insurgency of 1783 that intersected with the Sannyasi and Fakir uprisings, which were fuelled by different causes but which nonetheless epitomised the breakdown of an older moral and political economy.

The Sannyasi and Fakir uprisings refer to a series of dramatic skirmishes (1760–1800) between the English East India Company and people known as sannyasis and fakirs. Broadly this category referred to gosians and *bairagis*, monastic orders that operated an extensive network of trade, usury, and mercenary military activity. They had risen to prominence in the eighteenth century when they offered their services to local polities and exercised broad political, economic and military influence as merchants, bankers and soldiers. Military assistance earned for valuable real estate dividends these abbots as they enjoyed rent-free lands. This was especially evident in Malda, Dinajpur and Mymensingh. As the English officer Robert Barlow reported on the gosains of Banaras, '(they) were a religious sect remarkable for their wealth and for their integrity in all commercial transactions'.

Their presence in the local economy came under threat when the English Company took a number of decisions. One was a ban on the free movement of the sannyasis along pilgrimage routes and their rights to levy contributions from villages along these routes and also a ban on their freedom to bear arms. Secondly, the Company in its drive for revenue maximisation tended to side with those large landlords who were in dispute with the powerful gosain moneylenders. Thirdly, it resumed rent-free lands (Baze Zamin [meaning 'alientated land'] regulation of 1788) thereby directly challenging their position and economic basis. In 1773,

Warren Hastings issued a proclamation banishing all Bairagis and Sannyasis from the province of Bengal and Bihar, only to face an immediate escalation in raids and attacks. These took the form of attacks directed against the zamindars, especially those who enjoyed the support of the Company, creating war-like conditions. In the winter of 1773, the fakirs led by Majnu Shah teamed with a body of sannyasis and moved towards the Brahmaputra. Four companies of sepoys encountered the rebels in December 1773 and in the action that followed, the sannyasis were repulsed. However, it took three decades for their organisations or *akharas* to be disarmed in Bengal. What was especially marked about the uprisings was the large-scale peasant involvement in them after the famine of 1770. Finding common cause against the zamindars, peasants intercepted collected revenues, raided barns and grain storage centers and gave full expression to their alienation following the convulsions in agrarian society. As the Majnu Hakikat observed,

> The Company's agents and paiks, tortured artisans and ryots
> For exorbitant revenue and people deserted villages.
> Thousands of fakirs responded, and they stood behind Majnu their leader,
> Also the sannyasis assembled and fraternised
> Jointly the rebels attacked the kacheri, and ravaged the Company's kuthis.
> To recapture revenue and provisions, the English were afraid and crestfallen
> But they hoped their suffering would come to an end.

It was from such anger and dissatisfaction that peasant insurgency came to assume a clear focus as in the case of some districts like Rangpur in North Bengal. Here the defects of the revenue farming system had become acute under offenders like Debi Singh and Ganga Gobind Singh, who had terrorised the villagers. The peasants sent a petition seeking redress, but when this had no effect they armed themselves, elected their leaders, set up a rudimentary structure of authority and took on the zamindars. This was like a parallel government where even impositions for defraying the expenses of insurrection were enforced. The uprising saw Hindu and Muslim peasants come together and invoke symbols of the pre-colonial

system to legitimise their sphere of influence. The experiment was short lived as they were in no position to resist the Company's forces, which were sent to brutally suppress the rebellion. What was striking about this moment of insurgency was an unequivocal denunciation of the new order and a serious effort to write themselves into history. For the rebels, there was a common cause and that was to resist the inroads that the early colonial set up had made into agrarian society and eroded the older moral economy. This was true of the Sannyasi and Fakir uprisings as well; even if the peasants and sannyasis, either in terms of caste or occupation or even power, were not a unified group much less a class, the resentment that these sections felt about early Company rule invest it with the elements of a genuinely anti-colonial initiative.

The intersection of religion and rebellion has been seen as an important feature of early anti-colonial peasant resistance movements. One can argue that in an early modern world, religion would have been an important cementing force of identity and self-definition and that common, quotidian practices would have kept communities of artisans and cultivators strongly integrated. Islam played a major role in coalescing anti-establishment sentiment—this is well illustrated in the case of Titu Mir and the Tariqah-i-Muhammadiya movement. The context for this was the same—the oppression of the new class of intermediary zamindars whose aim was to augment revenue collections for the Company. This made for a tense and volatile relationship with the debt-ridden peasants. The conditions became even more difficult as considerations of the European community of indigo planters produced an oppressive alliance of power and capital against the peasant.

Titu Mir's career began as a hired muscleman of local zamindars, whose life was transformed by pilgrimage to Mecca where he came under the influence of Saiyid Ahmed of Rae Bareilly, who asked him to go back and work among the indigent peasantry in the local area. Titu Mir took up the challenge and focused initially on creating a pure set of Islamic practices and jettisoning those that were un-Islamic and thereby produce a community of renewed believers. A second and equally significant platform for his movement was the crusade against British rule, which he denounced as evil.

His campaigns stirred several sections to action—particularly enthusiastic were the oppressed and poor peasants and weavers or *jolahas* who demonstrated their anger against local zamindars like Krishna Deb Ray, who attempted to increase impositions on the peasants. The latter refused to comply and a full-fledged state of militancy came into effect. In October 1830, Titu Mir issued a proclamation saying that he and his followers were masters of the country and that the period of British rule had ended. Another decree stated that the zamindars and taluqdars of the locality should hereafter remit revenues to him and not to the British treasury. These decrees were followed up by attacks on markets, moneylenders and zamindars. This created consternation, and let to a combined front of zamindars and European planters and thereafter the British government. The attacks on the zamindaris of Kaliprasanna Mukherjee and Debnath Ray, followed by attacks on estates of indigo planters (distributed over Barasat and Nadia) indicated the seriousness of the challenge. In November 1830, Titu Mir declared himself as the *badshah* or emperor and appointed one Moinuddin, a jolaha of Rudrapur as his wazir and his nephew Gholam Masum as the chief commander. A considerable following of poor peasants came forward to join Titu Mir, who held sway over a substantial area. In this 'liberated domain', he was able to exercise autonomous authority, to bring zamindars to their knees, collect taxes and administer justice. He built a bamboo fort—a humble bastion that nevertheless kept the spirit of insurrection alive. As the District Magistrate of Nadia remarked in his correspondence in 1831 to the Governor-General, 'After what I myself have witnessed of the spirit, the resolution and fanaticism of this most extraordinary body of men, whose numbers could not have been less than 1500 in league with all the surrounding villages, I have no hesitation in making the most urgent representations to the government of the necessity for prompt and efficient aid.' The retaliation, when it came, was swift and the bamboo fortress was destroyed, Titu defeated and slain and his following ruthlessly suppressed.

Yet another religious movement that developed among the East Bengal peasantry was the Faraizi movement, which also emphasised a purer version of Islam and the abandonment of un-Islamic practices.

Taking inspiration form the Koran as their sole spiritual guide, it's following under the leadership of Shariatullah and Dadu Mian raised the banner of rebellion against the planters, zamindars and the government. Dadu's organisational skill was in evidence when he built a number of village organisations in the districts of Faridpur, Bakarganj, Dacca, Pabna, Tippera, Jessore and Noakhali. He also ran a parallel system of arbitration and administration and kept up the resistance through the 1840s, when armed confrontations continued. Even though the movement failed to win any permanent concessions from the authorities like in the case of the Santhal rebellion, it was an important embodiment of the social instability that the early colonial regime had created and more significantly of the fierce anger it produced among its dissenters. Admittedly, this could not transcend communal and other differences—religion, in this case Islam preferred to work within a closed community and could not persuade other sections of the peasantry to make common cause. However, as a mark of protest and of dissent, the movement was important as it revealed the possibilities of an autonomous political space on the part of the subaltern groups in agrarian society. There were limits to these possibilities and we will have occasion to comment on them.

Maplahs and Santhals

If Bengal became the most serious casualty of the politics of British revenue extraction, then Malabar had the misfortune of coping with the twin pressures of Mysore and the English East India Company. Here the standard bearers for the anti-British rebellions were the Maplahs—descendants of Arab traders who had married local women and whose ranks were subsequently filled by lower caste Hindus. Over time, they became an agricultural community, whose fortunes were affected by the new legislation that the British introduced in relation to land tenure arrangements. Prior to this, Malabar had been exposed to the invasions of Mysore, whose ruler Tipu had also intervened in the agrarian arrangements of Malabar. In fact revenue settlements in this region were complicated by

the absence of an identifiable pre-colonial state structure with a bureaucratic apparatus. In fact the Mysore officer Arshad Beg had taken the lead in settling with the royal households in Malabar and also in settling with intermediary holders that included Maplahs and Tiyas. Traditionally in this region, there was an equal sharing of the net produce of the land by the *jenmi* (holder of jenmi tenure) and the *kanamdar* (holder of kanam tenure) and the cultivator. In 1792, when the British took over Malabar and considered the question of overhauling the system of tenurial arrangements, they were wary of alienating the Maplahs, but nonetheless pressed forward with the idea of creating jenmis as absolute owners of land. Maplah chiefs like Unni Matta refused to bow down and as the joint commissioners expressed their views in 1793, 'what ideas he has of obedience may be judged by his flags, his Nekarah and beating the Nobit, as well as having in his pay, exclusive of Mapillas several Carnatic sepoys'. By 1800 a loose confederation of Maplah chiefs had formed and they sent out a warning to the Company. Some of the principal leaders of this confederation were Unni Matta, Chemban Poker and Athan Gurukkal, who had amassed landed property under Mysorean rule. By January 1800, the Maplahs had broken out in open defiance but this was suppressed by 1802. Insurgency however, continued throughout the century, as mosques became nuclei of the resistance. The fact was that British control and the new arrangements that they introduced restored the landed aristocracy of Nambudri and Nair jenmis and undercut the powers of the kanamdars or tenants, and worse still, transferred the burden of revenue to the tenants and poor cultivators. As K. N. Panikkar has demonstrated, not only was the tax burden heavy, but its incidence was also unequal. Thus, less well-connected villagers were over-assessed, the well-connected lightly assessed. Within the landlord-tenant dyad, land revenue ultimately became the tenant's burden, concentrating the social pain of taxation both on weaker owners and on tenants in particular. Revenue imperatives were not limited to solutions through land taxation, but included taxation of numerous items of importance to the poor and to the establishment of official monopolies and fixed-price procurement of commodities. As R. Herring demonstrates, monopolies on salt, timber and tobacco increased unemployment in those sectors, thus increasing agrarian pressure. By 1849, salt and tobacco monopolies yielded half the value of land revenue, compared to less than 10 per cent in the period 1809–13. Among the fifty or so specific taxes collected, particularly abhorrent were those on items necessary for livelihoods: shops, cattle, looms, tapping knives, fishing nets, ferries, etc. Panikkar notes that 'nothing' fell outside the colonial state's taxation net. Colonial officials recognised that these taxes, though essential for fiscal reasons, were particularly 'obnoxious.' Under the circumstances, agrarian violence was inevitable and as happened elsewhere, this was expressed in a religious idiom. The uprisings began in 1836 and continued sporadically throughout the century.

While colonial officials preferred to call this uprising an expression of religious fanaticism, it is evident that the Maplahs resented the influence of the jenmis who seemed to have illegitimate powers to evict them. There were messianic tendencies that were familiar in peasant rebellions but the focus of the agitation was the landlord and the state. The uprisings became progressively more intense and reflected the tensions that British rule and the attendant changes had introduced in rural society.

With the Santhals, the situation was somewhat different, although on the surface there were certain commonalities and the anger against the three pillars of colonial rule—landlord, moneylender and police—spilled out in the form of uprisings. The Santhal uprising was one of the most successful tribal rebellions in British India. The Santhals were a tribe residing in what is now known as Jharkhand. In British India, they were to be found in Cuttack, Manbhum, Palamau, Hazaribagh, and parts of Midnapur, Bankura and Birbhum. They remained wedded to their way of life but faced pressure when agents of colonial rule claimed rights on Santhal territories. This forced the Santhals to move up along the area around the Rajmahal hills, which they cleared and claimed as their own, designating it as *damin-i-koh*. This did not put an end to the pressures they continued to face from zamindars, moneylenders and European interests, whose penetration into the Santhal dominions completely wrecked their ways of life. Taking advantage of their poverty and innocence, moneylenders inveigled them into

their trap by offering them loans and thereby binding them into relations of debt-ridden subordination. The Santhal response to these pressures took the form of widespread discontent in village and pargana councils where the three most quoted complaints were first, fraudulent manipulation of moneylenders who falsified accounts, committed perjury and corrupted government clerks; second, the rapacity of tax collectors and landlords and third, the cruelty of the police. The flashpoint came in Barhait where there was a sudden mobilisation of a considerable force that took up arms. The events that led up to this moment were equally dramatic. One version of the build up is that two brothers, Sidu and Kanu, received a visitation from their creator god—the awesome Marang Buru who had never appeared before a human presence and who had given the chosen brothers a white, blank paper on which to write commands to Santhals to avenge their oppression. The news spread like wild ire and before long, several white papers surfaced and circulated symbolically, urging people to take action. The mark of paper symbolising the illiteracy of the Santhals and their oppression at the hands of the moneylenders with their paper documentation was especially significant. On 30 June 1855, 10,000 Santhals gathered in an encampment outside the village where the two brothers lived and declared their aim of doing away with the Bengali and upcountry *mahajans* and setting up a government of their own. Letters were written by Kirta, Bodhoo and Sunno at Sidu's direction to the government Commissioner, Collector and Magistrate at Bhagalpur, the Collector and Magistrate at Birbhum and darogas at these places and to several zamindars. This was the last formal attempt at reconciliation but the ruse did not work. Thereafter a spate of violence characterised Santhal reactions—brutal attacks on moneylenders and policemen and finally an armed uprising of about 30,000 Santhals armed with bows and arrows against individual moneylenders and tax collectors. The insurrection spread and engulfed the region between Bhagalpur and Rajmahal, paralysing the Company's government. Some low caste non-tribal peasants joined in the fray, only to invite fierce reprisals. Santhal villages were burnt down and the uprisings quelled brutally. The disorders came to an end after nearly two months and at the coast of 60,000 Santhal lives.

Mahajan

Banker, great merchant. Collectively the term stood for a corporation of traders typically belonging to the same trade.

It must be remembered that this uprising was not in any clear sense anti-colonial or anti-British. It was very specifically directed against the rapacious moneylender and cruel police whose intercession was especially hostile. There was never an identifiable sense of alienation against the British regime per se. As it happened, the colonial state stepped in very quickly and efficiently to redress the grievances of the Santhals, with the result that a more cordial relationship ensued. The territories that they inhabited were grouped under a new territorial unit—the Santhal Parganas—and it was henceforth stipulated that the usual bureaucratic and judicial procedures of British India would not apply there. Further, there were special provisions for land rights and it became illegal for a Santhal to transfer land to non-Santhals. The administrative centre moved to Dumka while a new role was assigned to Santhal village headmen, thereby making them protected tribal subjects of the colonial state.

The scale and incidence of agrarian uprisings in British India before the mutiny makes clear one thing, namely that colonial rule had decisively transformed the existing configurations of rural society and had generated serious social tension and large-scale material degradation. While it may not always be possible to quantify the exact magnitude of change and deprivation, it is certainly evident that a deep sense of alienation and unease at the existing material reality gave a jolt to the older moral economy of peasants and cultivators. This was especially evident when the mutiny broke out in northwestern India, where the grievances of the sepoys and the peasants collapsed into one general sense of simmering discontent and fear that was couched in terms of religion and custom that had nothing to do with theology or ritual as with a nameless dread of losing the rootedness that they had enjoyed. Before we look into this phenomenon and trace the social anatomy of the revolt of 1857, arguably one of the most significant rural uprisings of British India, let us pause to consider how histories of peasant resistance have been treated by historians.

Peasants in History

Peasant movements have not been unknown phenomena in human history. Admittedly the influence of Marxist historiography gave peasant insurrections in Mughal India a particular flavour and were seen as symptomatic of the parasitical nature of the Mughal system of agrarian taxation. Irfan Habib's seminal work on the agrarian system of Mughal India demonstrated how peasants and magnates came together briefly to undermine the official system and how these lineage-based movements of dissidence accommodated elements of genuine dynamism and possibility. For colonial India, where the effects of cash crop agriculture were more severe on the peasants and where new tenure arrangements upset the traditional ethic of subsistence and put immense pressure on the cultivator and the poor tenant, the response was equally and proportionately more volatile. This is by and large demonstrable, and thanks to the Subaltern Studies project, we have important insights into the world of peasant insurgency in British India. Thus, although peasant revolts have long been the staple of social and economic history, these assumed a special edge in the historiography of British rule and Indian nationalism in the aftermath of the Subaltern Studies collective. Pioneered by Ranajit Guha and his pathbreaking work *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India*, this collective sought to look at and explore the relations of dominance and subordination in rural India in the eighteenth, nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to make a case of the agency and autonomy of the peasants' domain. Conceived as an original site for a new social history from below, Subaltern Studies looked at theories and practice of subaltern resistance and more importantly, demonstrated how the very prose of counter-insurgency obliterated the peasant's autonomy. As Gyan Prakash writes in his review of Guha's writings, 'Consider for example the treatment of peasant rebellions. When colonial officials, using on-the-spot accounts, containing the code of pacification, blamed wicked landlords and wily moneylenders for the occurrence of these events, they used causality as a counter-insurgent instrument to identify the cause of revolt was a step in the direction of control over it and constituted a denial of the insurgent's agency.' Ranajit Guha thus wrote against the prose of counter-insurgency to understand peasant insurrections and consciousness on their own terms as far as possible by trying to make sense of their visions, practices, religiosity and bonds of community. His writings yielded important insights into the world of peasant consciousness and generated an important methodological shift—from reading colonial texts against the grain to consider the possibility of an autonomous domain of subaltern consciousness with all its limits. Seen from this perspective, the nineteenth century peasant revolts leading up to the mutiny have a fascinating story to tell, where peasant insurgents appropriated elite symbols of authority, inverted them to set up a parallel regime, however transiently. It was a world that was far removed from the elite of colonial cities and one that grappled with great difficulty the turbulence and ruptures that British rule had produced. Seen from this vantage point, there is little doubt that British rule, whenever one chooses to date it, was a defining moment of change and convulsion as far as the large masses of ordinary people were concerned. So the whole notion of 'Plus ce change plus c'est la méme chose' (Everything changes but nothing changes) may not entirely hold here and even if we grant some weight to the white ant thesis of Frykenberg, we need to reconcile the resilience of old elites with the enormity of agrarian pressure that fell upon the toiling peasant. And just how severe the sense of alienation was and how this intersected with the aspirations of warrior, landlord and ruler came into full focus in the mutiny of 1857.

Let us pause to consider some of the formulations of Guha regarding the agrarian transformation under British rule, the revival of what he calls landlordism and the broad elements of peasant insurgency. Major changes in property relations had deprived the peasants, in many cases, of their tenancy rights, while the mechanism of adjudication had enhanced the power of the landlords to oppress the peasants. The latter had hardly any recourse to channels of judicial arbitration—in any case the so-called *kanoon* was incomprehensible to them and they began to resent the nexus between the state and the landlord. The latter was hardly the model of an improving farmer interested in productivity

and sponsoring a capitalist revolution. His primary interest was revenue extraction that he was now able to do with more efficacy and with the support of the executive arm of government. The daroga, the lathiyal, the policeman became the new henchmen of the government whose authority the peasants could not but abhor. As the village community came under pressure and the authority of the village headman systematically eroded by the power of the new courts, the cultivator had no support system left to deal with rapacious collectors and magnates. To this list of class enemies was added the hated moneylender who coldly preyed upon the client cultivator and sucked him dry of surplus and savings, property and even subsistence. Discounting some of the excessively exaggerated accounts of rapacious moneylenders in British India, it is reasonable to argue that British rule—its land revenue system and its judicial system—gave money lenders an opportunity for enhancing their dominance in the countryside. Denying Indian custom, the British courts enforced the principle that a man's entire property was liable for the satisfaction of his debts. The result was an accretion of the moneylenders influence, and as sale figures for the northwest provinces show, the sale of land for debt by 1853 reached the figure of 114,000 acres a year and moneylenders held 10 per cent of the agricultural land of the province. This had serious consequences, as we shall have occasion to see in the context of the mutiny of 1857.

Clearly there were serious material compulsions for the peasants to take up arms and register their protest. How to characterise these acts of protest has remained a problem for historians who have access largely to official documentation that represented these acts as disruptions of law and order and as subversive activity. For the British government, the rebels were either savages or innocents who remained outside the domain of reason. For later nationalists these peasant rebels were heroes whose actions formed part of the genealogy of later day anti-colonial movements. Marxist historians like Atis Dasgupta argued through their writings on peasant resistance in Bengal that the outbreaks revealed a set of cohesive interests even though leadership came from the more dominant strata of peasant society and in the case of the sannyasi rebellions, from an altogether different class. For Stokes, these uprisings

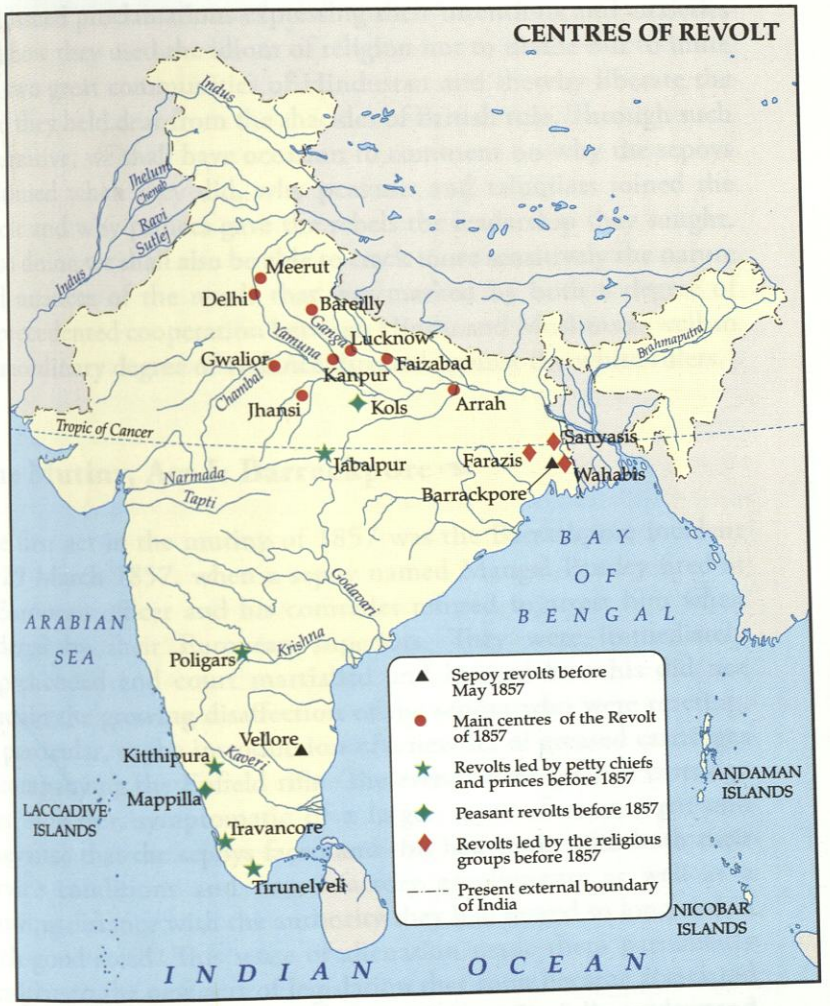
were part of a primary resistance movement that surfaced when a traditional society was compelled to state its defiance of external colonial rule. The notions of primary and secondary resistance were largely articulated by him for the African context but had a resonance in the case of India as well. Whether these movements were political in the fullest sense of the word is a matter of debate—some historians have argued that in terms of leadership and agenda, these were pre-political, although Guha suggests that everything about these movements was political and embodied a fully articulated consciousness. There was a very clear sense of who their aggressors were, they knew how to mobilise and appropriate and invert those very insignia of authority and legitimacy that had trapped them in relations of domination and subordination. Thus in his reckoning, peasant movements of the first three quarters of British rule represented a somewhat inchoate and naïve state of consciousness that was reflected in some general ideas that recurred time and again in acts of insurgency. Peasants registered their self-awareness through a series of forms like negation and radical inversion that lent a distinct character to these the uprisings.

In contrast, urban insurrections were relatively scarce in British India. We have instances of riots and rebellions by urban artisans, especially weavers, who seem to have constituted the core of insurgency. The riots of 1788 and 1795 in Surat, led principally by weavers and the disaffected lower elements of the ruling administration identified bania contractors who worked for the Company, and whose dealings smacked of an oppressive new order over which artisans had little control. Mobilisation was achieved through a network of preachers and mosques, and the insurrections assumed a communal slant as an angry mob converged on bania shopkeepers and merchants, destroying their account books and attacking their property. There were riots in southern India as well, and although these were not explicitly anti-colonial in their bias, they were undeniably expressions of tension that the new order, with its collaborators, had generated.

If then one were to time travel and look at India in 1856, one would have seen strangely contrasting worlds—of collaborators and casualties, of colonial cities with a cosmopolitan population

and villages facing drought and deprivation, of optimism and an almost exaggerated faith in the principles of liberty and rule of law and a sullen incomprehension of the new system and a nostalgia for a world that was unequal but more familiar. If poets in Delhi expressed their sadness at the passing of the older order, albeit in a self-indulgent way, peasants struggled to make good their living and waited for opportunities to strike out. If scribes and the new elite were fascinated by Western thought and literature and found in its adoption and adaptation new avenues of expression and economic activity, then sepoys and soldiers were all too conscious of the constraints in their service conditions and of apparent attacks on their customs and conventions that seemed to threaten their religion. Their grievances converged with a mass of agrarian resentment experienced by different sections of agrarian society in India—*thakur*s, princes and peasants to produce a rebellion that shook the Company Raj to its very foundations. The manner in which this rebellion broke out, the rapidity with which it spread across wide swathes of northern and central India, the complex and myriad ways in which it brought local landed interests and ex-sovereigns into its fold and the ways in which it articulated its language of protest and political agenda made its representation both complex and compelling, generating narratives and counter-narratives. Not without reason, therefore, has the character of the mutiny been such a complex and contentious issue of debate among contemporaries and historians. Its timing too was poignant; coming after exactly a century of colonial rule, its occurrence seemed to expose, among other things, a gradual disconnect of the British rulers with their Indian subjects. This is not to suggest that we can find a clear set of causes that explain the rebellion; in fact more recent scholarship on the mutiny argues that an approach that sets out in linear fashion the various causes of the revolt actually obscures the complexity of the movement, as it was pulled in different directions by different elements that came together and moved apart.

We will also jettison the conventional method of studying the revolt of 1857 and not attempt a simple cause-course-nature-consequences model. Rather we will begin with a full fledged



narrative of how the mutiny broke out, how it spread, how it accommodated new elements as it spread out from the cantonments and barracks to the rural areas, how the rebels marched to Delhi and issued proclamations expressing their intentions and anxieties and how they used the idiom of religion not to divide but to unite the two great communities of Hindustan and thereby liberate the land they held dear from the shackles of British rule. Through such a narrative, we shall have occasion to comment on why the sepoys mutinied when they did, why peasants and taluqdars joined the revolt and why princes gave the rebels the leadership they sought. In so doing we shall also be able to track more sensitively the nature and nuances of the revolt that was marked by both a degree of unprecedented cooperation between Hindu and Muslims as well an extraordinary degree of violence directed against the white rulers.

The Mutiny, Act I: Barrackpore

The first act in the mutiny of 1857 was the Barrackpore incident of 29 March 1857, when a sepoy named Mangal Pandey fired at a European officer and his comrades refused to arrest him when ordered by their European superiors. They were immediately apprehended and court martialled and hanged but this did not contain the growing disaffection of the sepoys who were reacting, in particular, to the introduction of a new set of greased cartridges accompanying the Enfield rifle. The event of the greased cartridge was, however, symptomatic of a larger sense of resentment and grievance that the sepoys faced and this had to do with both their service conditions and unsatisfactory emoluments as well as a growing distance with the authority they had served so long and in such good stead. This sense of alienation made them particularly sensitive to the new acts of legislation that soon became associated with attacks on personal faith and religion. To fully understand the nature of the sepoy grievances and their alienation, we need to examine the changing circumstances in which sepoys were fighting the wars of the Company and how earlier ties of loyalty and submission were getting seriously frayed. There was first of

all the material factor of emoluments—pay, pension and prospects were far from being attractive. In fact the average pay drawn by an infantryman was Rs 7 per month and a sawar from the cavalry drew Rs 27 per month from which he had to look after his mount as well. As a retired British officer noted, 'The entire army of India amounts to 315,520 men costing 9,802,235 pounds sterling—out of this sum no less than 5,668,110 are expended on 51,316 European soldiers. Moreover, the European corps takes no share in the rough ordinary duties of the service; they are lodged, fed and paid in a manner unknown to other soldiers'. Such a contrast could not but affect the morale of the sepoys who also had to additionally deal with difficult conditions of service, especially when forced to go overseas to fight the Company's wars. On a number of occasions this issue cropped up, exposing the chasm that was developing between the sepoys and their officers. In 1824, the sepoys in Bengal refused to cross the seas to fight in Burma. The Company retaliated strongly—ringleaders were hanged and the 47th Regiment of the Bengal Army was disbanded. In Afghanistan too, the sepoys faced considerable difficulty and these became mixed up with a genuine apprehension of losing their faith, in which the Company authorities became implicated. As Sitaram, a Hindu *subedar* serving in Kabul reported, 'great fears were felt by the sepoys at the idea of having to go across the Indus' for it seemed to be an act that was guaranteed to make one lose his caste. Such fears were largely on account of British carelessness in promulgating orders that touched a sensitive nerve and because of the growing distance between the officer corps and the ordinary soldier. Gone were the days of camaraderie and interest and notwithstanding occasional instances of individual friendship, the general atmosphere was one of scorn and suspicion. Bad manners, references to the sepoys as lazy niggers, foul language did not make matters easy and it was in this atmosphere of resentment that suspicion about the intentions and good faith of the British became steadily ubiquitous. The British, on their part, seem to have been oblivious to the growing distance—it is in fact hard to understand why they persisted with some orders year after year. The catalogue of such lapses is telling. In 1806, George Barlow issued instructions to remove caste markings,

to trim beards and to replace turbans with leather cockades. This was a highly unpopular order and contributed to an extent to the Vellore mutiny. Subsequent years saw orders relating to religious practices that proved equally provocative. The state made no efforts to quell such apprehensions. In 1855 for example, an assault was made on Colin McKenzie near Hyderabad by a Muslim horseman on the apprehension that the colonel had prohibited a Muharram procession. These apprehensions, even if occasionally baseless, contributed to a heightened sensitivity about faith and religion and fears of a forcible conversion became very real. In 1856 the General Service Enlistment Act was passed and this stipulated that all battalions in the Bengal Army would be required to accept service on the same conditions as men did in Madras and Bombay. In other words they would have to go overseas if necessary. Even though the authorities insisted that these new stipulations applied only to the new recruits, the sepoys were afraid that it would soon be extended to them. Further, there were other stipulations that announced those unfit for service would not be allowed to retire on invalid pensions but had to be employed on cantonment duty. Sepoys also lost their postage concessions—this was no longer free. All these restrictions fuelled a deep sense of resentment, which was expressed through the idiom of religion, which was seen to be in danger and which was the only comprehensible language of protest that they could summon. This assumed a particular urgency in connection with the new Enfield rifle and the greased cartridges that raised a wave of alarm among the sepoys.

In 1856 as part of military improvements, the Enfield rifle was introduced in India and along with it came greased cartridges and orders for fresh ones to be manufactured at Calcutta, Dum Dum and Meerut for the use of troops serving in India. Selected sepoys were sent to three training centres—Dum Dum, Ambala and Sialkot. Nothing untoward happened until this stage when news leaked out that the new cartridges were greased with questionable tallow of cows and pigs, making it taboo for both Hindu and Muslim. On 22 January 1857, Major Boutein of the Dum Dum Musketry Department noted that his men did not wish to use the new cartridges and said so quite deferentially. The British did not

immediately respond to the situation and the tardiness proved costly, for whisperings about the dreaded grease increased to produce the Mangal Pandey incident. Whether Pandey was under the influence of *bhang* (cannabis) or not is hardly relevant; what is important is the fact that by this time, the sense of an attack on religion and custom had become pervasive among the sepoys. Thus, when Pandey rampaged about abusing the Europeans and exhorting his fellowmen to join in the fray, he invoked religion. He is reported to have said, 'it is for our religion! From biting these cartridges we shall become infidels. Get ready! Turn out all of you!' Pandey was overpowered with the help of Shaikh Paltu, restrained and hanged but his act had ignited a forest fire. From Barrackpore, the Mutiny spread to Meerut (10 May 1857), where once again the case of greased cartridges, fear of pollution and loss of religion provided the spark. Before the mutiny actually erupted, there was a deep sense of unease among the English commanders—a sense that something violent was about to happen. On the eve of the mutiny outbreak in Meerut in fact, a captain worried about the feelings of his men regarding the 'cartoos' wrote to a colleague at headquarters:

> Feeling ... is as bad as can be and matters have gone so far that I can hardly devise any suitable remedy. We make a grand mistake in supposing that because we dress, arm and drill Hindustani soldiers as Europeans, they become one bit European in their feelings and ideas. I see them on parade for two hours daily, but who do I know them for the other? What do they talk about in their lines? What do they plot? For all I can tell I might as well be in Siberia. I know that at the present moment an unusual agitation is pervading the ranks of the entire native army, but what it will result in, I am afraid to say. I can detect the near approach of the storm. I can hear the moaning of the hurricane but I can't say how, when, or where it will break forth. Everywhere far and near, the army under some maddening impulse, are looking out with strained expectation for something, some unseen invisible agency has caused one common electric thrill to run thro' all. I don't think they know themselves what they will do, or that they have any plan of action except of resistance to invasion of their religion and their faith. But Good God! Here are all the elements of combustion at hand, 100,000 men, sullen, distrustful, fierce, with all their deepest and inmost sympathies, as well as worst passions, roused, and we are thinking to cajole them into good humour by patting them on the back, saying what a fool you are for making such a fuss about nothing. They no longer believe us, they have passed out of restraint and will be off at a gallop before long.

The observations were telling of two things, namely a perceptible sense of mounting anger against the British and an admission of British failure in understanding the sepoy subjects who had loyally served them and fought their wars. I am not sure that the anger and resentment was the product of British racism, although admittedly there were instances of extreme arrogance that was part of being the dominant race in the subcontinent and most definitely the racial anger was expressed in the most brutal of counter-insurgency measures. But the situation leading up to 1857 was largely the product of an alienation that British rule in all its various dimensions had engendered with racial arrogance only one of the many constitutive elements.

The storm finally broke on 10 May 1857. What precipitated this was a parade of the 3rd Native Light Cavalry on the morning of 6 May 1857. When cartridges were passed around, 86 of the sepoys refused to accept them despite persuasion and intimidation. In the court of inquiry that followed, the offenders were tried, condemned and sentenced to ten years of hard labour. The sentences were read out in the parade ground before the British and Indian troops as the sentenced men were stripped of their shoes and uniform and had their ankles strapped. It was an act of gross humiliation and set the signal for the mutiny that broke out the following evening. One group of sepoys left for the prison to release the 86 incarcerated men

Leaders of 1857

Tantiya Tope (Gwalior)
Nana Saheb (Kanpur)
Rani Lakshmibai (Jhansi)
Khan Bahadur Khan (Bareilly)
Emperor Bahadur Shah II

Among the more local leaders, mention may be made of the following: Khairati Khan in Muzaffarnagar, Sayyids of Bulandshahr, Umrao Singh in Manakpur, Kunwar Singh in Bihar, and Hyder Ali Khan and Judhar Singh in Gaya.

while another group wound its way to the old prison house to release other prisoners. By dusk even as the English tried to gather their wits, the mutineers had fled and began plundering the European bungalows and murdering their inhabitants. The police left their positions while villagers from surrounding areas poured in to take part in the loot and plunder that followed. The mutineers now took the decision to march to Delhi. They reached the city, won over three regiments, murdered or expelled the European officers and approached the Emperor to take up their cause. Thus within a very short spell of time, what had begun as a series of random mutinous incidents had swelled into political rebellion. Delhi had suddenly become the epicentre of a full-fledged revolt.

Mutiny on the Ganges

Between May and June 1857, the mutiny spread to other stations as well—one after the other, the regiments at the stations to the east began to revolt. First came Aligarh on 20 May, and then in the next few days at Mainpuri, Bulandshahr, Etawah and Mathura (23–27 May). On 30 May, the mutiny occurred in Lucknow after weeks of tense waiting. Since early May, when the 7th Regiment of the Awadh Irregular Infantry refused to accept the cartridge, there were acts of symbolic violence and public exhortations to rise in revolt against the hated Company. Finally on 30 May, the expected uprising broke out in the open with the usual burning of property and attack on European bungalows. This was quickly followed by rebellions in other stations—Sitapur, Faizabad, Gonda, Sultanpur and Salon. By the opening week of June, the movement engulfed the northwestern provinces as far as Banaras and it seemed that the Company Raj had all but vanished. Everywhere, the call 'Chalo Delhi' formed a rallying cry to give some unity to the bands of distracted men who drew the support of city artisans, labourers and policemen. Simultaneously a call to safeguard 'Deen' and 'Dharam' was voiced. The fear of loss of caste seemed to be all-pervasive—not in a strictly limited sense of pollution and purity but in a generalised sense of loss of status that had been the hallmark of earlier recruits to the Company army. The erosion of these markers by the Company's insistence on new and demeaning practices was unacceptable. This genuine apprehension was backed by real material factors as we have already enumerated. In all stations that experienced the mutiny, the targets of destruction were government buildings, telegraph lines, post offices, courts, jails and record rooms—in other words, as Rudrangshu Mukherjee argues—all embodiments of colonial authority. In Allahabad, European houses were attacked; in Aligarh, one large indigo factory was set on fire; in Etawah, the session court or *kacheri* were victims of incendiary attacks. Records were burnt and everywhere the insignia of authority were sought to be erased. Kanpur was no exception, except that it was this town that the most horrific of attacks on women and children were perpetrated.

Places where the mutiny occurred

Barrackpore
Meerut
Kanpur
Delhi
Benaras
Lucknow
Gwalior
Jhansi

A third centre of mutiny emerged in central India or Bundelkhand. On 5 June, the rebellion began with the mutiny of the 12th Native Infantry in Jhansi. The rebels captured the treasury, threw open jails to release prisoners and urged the residents to support them in the defense of their religion. Other occurrences followed swiftly at Nowgong, Khurrea, Lalitpur and Hamirpur, where the mutineers targeted British establishments and even beat up Bengali clerks for writing in English. The rebels marched up to Rani Lakshmi Bai's palace and demanded her support and threatened to kill her if she did not volunteer it. Some proceeded to Kanpur and Delhi and according to Tapti Roy, they were working to a political plan of overthrowing British rule. This was no random occurrence—it was a calculated move to overthrow British rule from various cantonments and construct an alternative political structure in Delhi or Kanpur. This was also evident when they as much as forced the Rani of Jhansi to support their cause and override the pronouncement of Nawab Ali Bahadur of Banda by stating '*Khalq Khuda ka, Mulk badsha ka, Hukum subedar sipahi ka.*

The implications of the mutiny were many. At a basic level, it meant that the British could no longer rely on the support and

countenance of their subordinates and that their rule had lost its most central pillar of support—the army. At a secondary but even more serious level, the mutiny unleashed the anger and resentment of the rural populace, whose intervention made it even more significant as a threat to the colonial state. In fact civil rebellions came alongside the military mutiny almost simultaneously, lending it a dynamism that could not be easily contained. The disaffection of the sepoys merged with the simmering discontent of the populace, each section of which had different reasons for their alienation. It is to this aspect of the mutiny that we shall now turn our attention.

Rural Rebellions and the Mutiny of 1857

Among the historians who have worked on the rural rebellions in the mutiny of 1857, Eric Stokes assumes pride of place. Stokes analysed the nature of the rural uprisings in the northwestern provinces of the Gangetic plains—in Saharanpur, Mathura, Rohilkhand and Badaon, where the 'the mass of the population rose in a body, and the entire district became a scene of anarchy and confusion'. Aligarh and Etah, according to the British officer Colvin, were 'in a blaze of riot and ravage', while further down the Doab, the Allahabad Commissioner reported, 'the revolt at once assumed the character of a Mohammedan religious war' in which the zamindars with 'scarcely an exception joined their brethren, with the object of exterminating the English and upsetting the Government.' The mass of the Hindustani race, as George Campbell put it, 'had in this crisis wavered in their allegiance and became more or less tinged by rebellion.' What these contemporary observations reflect is how quickly the mutiny had resonated with the resentments of the rural populace—cultivators, landlords, pastoralists, Rajputs, Muslims—all of them breaking out in rebellion against the British, whom they saw as their chief enemy. Predictably, the forms the rebellion assumed were attacks on government offices and treasury, on moneylenders and bankers whose account books were destroyed and damaged. Even though all these risings were not coordinated, what was apparent was the rapidity with which information

was relayed from the mutineers through the local police to the neighboring countryside. Thus, the Meerut uprising was almost simultaneously followed by a wave of Gujar and Rangar rebellions in Saharanpur, Deoband and Sirsawa, spilling further on to the banks of the Jamuna and Ganga into Ambala, Moradabad and Rohilkhand. In the Muzaffarnagar district, disaffected elements were drawn from impoverished Sayyid communities, some of whose leaders instigated the fierce Jat and Gujar peasant rebellions. This district also saw the rising of Thana Bhawan, headed by Enayet Ali, one that proved to be among the bloodiest of the mutiny. In the Saharanpur district too, Gujars were at the forefront of resistance and revolt and attacked banias, destroying their accounts and bonds. In Awadh, the mutiny assumed a strongly popular character as taluqdars and peasants hurried to express their allegiance.

Why did such a front come into being and how did rural disaffection converge with the resentment of the mutineers? Besides the larger issue of anger and inchoate fears of caste loss and attacks on religion which all rebels would appear to have shared, there was the more immediate question of material grievances that affected the world of the peasantry and the magnate. The targeting of the moneylender by the rebels was telling, for he embodied, in some areas at least, the transformation that British tenurial arrangements and land revenue policy had wrought. This is not to say that in all areas the writ of the moneylender ran large, but to make the larger point that Stokes did, about the effects of over-assessment, the pressures of revenue demand and how these impacted different rural groups differently. The sign of pressure normally was distress sales and as Stokes has shown, in districts like Aligarh, Mainpuri, Mathura and Banda, there were compulsory sales of proprietary rights among village communities for revenue default. Over-assessment then went a long way in explaining popular rebellion. The disappearance of old magnates as a consequence of the British annexation of the Ceded Provinces in 1803–4, the pressures on the village community, the transfer of lands to mahajans produced fierce anger. This was not a uniform phenomenon—in fact one point that Stokes' study emphasises is how there were contrasting conditions and contrasting responses and that in actual fact in

some cases, the principal elements of the revolt came where land revenue assessment was highest and the mahajan hold lightest and that too in badly irrigated, thirsty backward tracks. On the other hand, in the western portion of Muzaffarnagar where Jat enterprise was evident, they were still held down by a punishing revenue demand. The differential rates imposed on the Jat peasantry in the 1830s and 1840s by Plowden and Henry Elliott in the parganas of Budhana, Kandhla, Shamli and Shikapur were recognised after 1857 as intolerably oppressive. This incensed the Jats who as Stokes comments, found their ancestral lands 'mulcted so savagely in contrast with their caste brethren to the east, especially in the fertile provinces of parganas Khatauli and Jansath.' (Stokes, *The Peasant Armed*, 1986) For Stokes, the issue was complex—a combination of severe material pressure along with a psychological sense of displacement and loss of honour. As he puts it, 'Revolt cannot be seen purely in terms of economic determinism, for motive is relative not merely to deprivation but to power. Those revolt who are most fit to revolt, and intensity of felt grievance is doubtless always proportional to fighting and organisational capability. The threshold of tolerability might be lower than 10 per cent for armed Jat or Gujar communities while losses of up to 60 per cent of their land would be borne passively by disorganised Sayyid gentry communities.' So different combinations—peasants without magnates, peasants on their own, decayed Muslim gentry with impoverished Gujar and Rangar peasantries—indicated how widespread disaffection was with the British Raj and its Bania agents. At the root of the disaffection was the burden felt by owner-cultivators in the mahalwari assessed areas where there was an increase in sales—an index of the pressure. Where agriculture was under pressure, high revenue demands drove peasants into debt and dispossession. The transfer of property to other groups put the banias at the centre of protest although as mentioned earlier, the story was not as simple and straightforward. For one, not all taluqdars suffered under the British regime—in many areas, traditional landed castes retained their proprietary rights, often new magnates emerged in place of old ones and adjusted well to the situation, constituting a solid bloc of support to the British.

Also, even in the areas of over-assessment, mahajan influence was not as pervasive as presupposed, for dry lands with high revenue assessments were hardly attractive to the moneylenders—in fact it was in areas where there was successful cash cropping that their influence was more substantial.

In Awadh, as Rudrangshu Mukherjee has demonstrated, the revolt assumed a popular character with all classes fighting on behalf of their sepoy kinsmen and their deposed nawab. This united front included taluqdari landlords who had suffered from British annexation and the new settlement and their peasants, even though many had been awarded titles. It included urban elements who reacted to the increasing prices of essential goods and old retainers who saw an old order slipping by. Over-assessment and loss of other rights alienated the taluqdars while the peasant could no longer depend on older ties of protection and support.

The collective grievances were given expression to by religious men who flocked into Lucknow, like Maulvi Ahmedullah and Qadir Ali Shah who gave out a call for jehad. In fact religion was so closely intertwined with the mutiny that colonial historians tended to overplay its importance. More modern research tends to look at this dimension differently but before we address this issue, let us pause to consider the involvement of regional chiefs and rulers in the mutiny and the issue of violence that characterised this occurrence.

As mentioned before, almost immediately after the Meerut uprising the rebels left for Delhi and indeed from every other station that suffered the mutiny, the tendency was to go to Delhi and appeal to the old Emperor to take the mantle of political leadership. We have also noted how in central India, rebels urged the Rani of Jhansi to take up their cause, thereby initiating lines of communication with leaders. In Kanpur, the reins were assumed by the adopted son of Peshwa Baji Rao II—Nana Saheb, who had been a British loyalist and who changed sides when rebels cornered him. Admittedly he had his grievances—namely of a reduced pension just as Lakshmi Bai had hers. Neither had much option though, surrounded as they were by a mutinous soldiery, and also seeing in this an opportunity of expressing their own personal grievances against British power.

Why the rebels wanted political leadership of the established rulers of the land is not very clear—one may speculate that they saw in the Emperor the only real fount of legitimacy. They invoked an older system that was more familiar even if not equal or egalitarian. British rule had deracinated them—social reforms and land revenue arrangements had thrown an entire way of life out of gear, and it was only an older idiom of authority that made sense. This is not to suggest that the rebels had willingly surrendered all initiative to their leaders but to be aware of the limits of rebel consciousness that did not find it difficult to slip back to older structures of deference and hierarchy. For the moment however, there was a heady sense of excitement and solidarity; leaders like Azimullah, agent of Nana Saheb, stated quite categorically, 'What fools, then, we natives have made of ourselves, so quietly to surrender our country to a handful of tyrannical foreigners, who are trying in many ways to deprive us of our religion and our privileges. It behoves us, therefore—and I call upon you all to join heart and hand—to extirpate our enemies, root and branch, from the face of all India. Let not a soul escape, let not the name of a Christian be ever named in Hindoostan. We are strong and numerous to keep our own.'

The coming together of rebel and prince, peasant and taluqdar pointed to a deep and congealed sense of anger and resentment against British rule and of an equally felt identification with an old order that they wished to reinstate. This was evident in the numerous *ishtahar*s that were issued by the rebels in Devanagri and Urdu calling upon Hindus and Muslims to unite in defence of their religion. Historians have used these various proclamations to speak of a commonality of interest, of collaboration between the two communities, and also in the process, to complicate the idea of religion as immediately understood by the rebels. In Rajat Ray's view, the two communities were striving to construct their respective sacred realms by ousting the common enemy and were both profoundly moved by a sense of their land. Religion, either as *izzat* and sense of honour or as faith constituted by certain practices was the one idiom that rebels could invoke to articulate a burning anger against the new rulers. It also seemed to provide them with a justification for perpetrating some of the most horrific masscares like the one in

Satichaura in Kanpur that Mukherjee has studied. In the pamphlet called Fateh Islam issued by Maulvi Ahmadullah Shah, there was a clear exhortation to both Hindus and Muslims to cooperate as brethren to butcher the English. The massacre that happened in Satichaura took the spectacle of a public execution—a violent retribution for the violent crime of British occupation. Nor did the circle end here—more massacres and more reprisals followed.

The involvement of leaders in the mutiny has often been studied with reference to the consequences of British expansion under Lord Dalhousie. It is true that the application of the Doctrine of Lapse aroused a degree of indignation while the accelerated pace of social reform had affected the conservative sections of Indian society. Even though we cannot draw a straight line between social reform and mutinous behaviour, one must appreciate the sense of unease and alienation that social reforms produced in the minds of traditional men, aristocrats and peasants alike. To them, British reform seemed to undermine the basic foundations of the Indian social system. For princes the annexations portended disaster—especially as their pensions dwindled and their retainers lost employment. Under these circumstances, it is easy to see how several dispersed elements came together to fight almost as a last ditch defense of the old order. British interference in the princely states and the de-recognition of adopted sons of deceased princes as legal heirs and the annexation of their kingdoms brought about a common platform between Nana Saheb, Khan Bahadur Khan in Rohilkhand, Begum Hazrat Mahal in Lucknow and Rani Lakshmi Bai of Jhansi, who assumed leadership of the sepoy cause and then fought to the bitter end.

Given the combination of so many discrete elements that came together in the summer of 1857, it is easy to see why the characterisation of the movement has been complex and deeply contentious. Contemporary British opinion tended to dismiss it as an act of vile conspiracy of disaffected elements in the army—hence the emphasis that it was a mutiny and nothing more. Implicit in this was a focus on the greased cartridges as the principal cause of the catastrophe and a deliberate downplaying of the civil rebellions that were dismissed as aberrations on the part of some

discontented potentates and selfish nobles. Nationalist historians of India on their part took a different view altogether and began to see it as an important prelude to the nationalist struggle. The first nationalist interpretation of the event was offered in 1907 by Veer Savarkar who called the revolt of 1857 the 'Indian War of Independence' when the Indians rose up in arms for safeguarding their religion (*swadharma*) and their land (*swaraja*). The central focus of the revolt was no longer the armed sepoys but the people who were groaning under the yoke of foreign rule. The mutiny, in more ways than one, resonated with the nationalist aspirations of twentieth century leaders who saw in rebel actions their own agenda and anxieties. Subsequent historians attempted a more circumspect treatment of the event. R. C. Majumdar argued that the mutiny brought different kinds of people fighting for different interests and that the miseries and bloodshed of 1857 were not the birth pangs of a freedom movement. S. N. Sen in his centenary volume on the mutiny denied that the rebel leaders were in any way 'nationalist' in the modern sense of the term. His account looked at the military mutiny in the cantonment towns, and while he asked a series of questions about the spontaneity or otherwise of the uprising, whether it was religious or racial, these questions were almost rhetorical in nature, without any real suggestions provided. He admitted the use of religion as the unifying factor but denied that the rebels had any clear conceptions about either individual freedom or territorial allegiance. Tarachand's four volume narrative saw the mutiny as the last attempt of a medieval order—the rebels had no positive agenda. Marxist scholars emphasised the peasant dimensions of the revolt and looked at the peasant action as a heroic resistance thwarted only by the betrayal of the propertied classes. Of course this was not taken seriously by all Marxists and we have, for instance, P. C. Joshi arguing that there was no evidence that the Indian peasantry 'during this struggle decisively burst through the feudal bond either politically or economically to transform a broad-based national uprising into a peasant war.' The peasantry attacked only the British created landlords—there was no struggle against landlords as a class. This line was more in keeping with the arguments of S. B. Chaudhuri even as subsequent

characterisations critiqued nationalist discourse that tended to obscure all those elements that did not neatly fit into a clear cut structure of intention and causality. This meant that the attacks by peasants and magnates which were not easily explained by a simple linear narrative were left out or ignored until S. B. Chaudhuri's writings opened up a new range of possibilities.

Chaudhuri focused on the civil rebellions that were intertwined with the mutiny. There could thus be no single cause explaining the mutiny and for him there were elements of continuity in the civil and military uprisings; the former led by feudal magnates who brought together diverse peoples of all classes, who made common cause with them in complete disregard of the forces of estrangement which might otherwise exist in social and economic life. The outcome was the creation of a national outburst against British rule caused by social and economic discontent. Following Chaudhuri's interest in civil rebellions, Eric Stokes came up with what was undeniably the most important micro-study of rural rebellion in the northwestern provinces. For him, the revolt was a post-pacification resistance precipitated by the differential impact of British rule on different segments of rural society. The revolt fell between the primary resistance of the formal apparatus of traditional society and the secondary resistance of an enlarged scale through pacific secular associations. The dismantling of the formal power structure produced a widespread reaction but which was a compartmentalised rally of heterogeneous elements held together loosely by an anti-foreign and religious sentiment. This applied to the 1857 uprising where the combined action of governmental and economic pressure encouraged the defection of lower level collaborators, namely a high caste peasant mercenary army inflamed by intolerable religious grievance and threatened with displacement by low caste outsiders. This did not of course mean that rural disturbances and military action were perfectly concerted; peasant uprisings in any case were complex affairs as we have seen so far. The revolt was certainly a last ditch stand by die-hard elements of Indian society and assumed different dimensions in different areas—in some areas like in Awadh there was primary resistance by taluqdars, in other areas there was

political resistance like in central India and even in Banaras. As the conclusion in Bayly's edited work on Stokes suggests, it is impossible to disentangle the economic element from its social and political integument. Neither the forced commercialisation of agriculture nor heavy taxation, nor indebtedness, mortgage or distress sales of land titles, can on their own explain the incidence and character of rural violence. Rudrangshu Mukherjee's work on Awadh identified popular elements but made the important point that taluqdar participation was not uniform—some were rebels, others loyal and even some who were forced by peasants to join the revolt. Tapti Roy, in her study of the revolt in Bundelkhand, focuses more squarely on popular action and prefers to ascribe more agency to the 'people element' in the rebellion and argues that the rebellion by the popular elements was deeply political and did envisage an alternative political conception and a parallel structure of rule. Just as thakurs in the area mobilised with their usual dogged resistance, the peasants were able to organise several conspicuous jacqueries that were decidedly anti-British. All these explanations are partially valid and draw attention to the complex causes that produced outrage and anger among different sections of the populace. There is no doubt that the sepoy discontent was a primary ingredient of the rebellion, without which the popular outburst would not have occurred. But once that did happen, other sections of the populace were drawn to the possibility of rebellion and joined the banner of resistance. Political disenfranchisement of the ruling aristocracy, dispossession and sales that affected magnates and peasants meant that rural people made common cause with the rebels and their leaders to try and expel the alien regime that seemed to fundamentally undermine their religion. Of course as mentioned before and as Rajat Ray has argued, religion was an umbrella idea that carried with it multiple connotations of status, fealty to an old order and practices that British rule had contemptuously set aside.

Yet another feature that marked the revolt of 1857 was violence on the part of both rebels and the British—a feature that has been studied with great imagination by Rudrangshu Mukherjee. Racial savagery in fact was marked on both sides—the most extreme

example of Indian violence was when the garrison at Kanpur surrendered to Nana Sahib, who despite his promise of safe passage rained fire on them and turned the other way when a terrible massacre was perpetrated. The massacre was followed by Nana Saheb's installation on the throne and celebrations of the fact that the Christians had been exterminated and that the religions of Hindus and Muslims have been confirmed. According to Mukherjee, the violence of rebel power was emblematic of a collective justice—a primitive punishment that the brutality of conquest in the first place had made inevitable and that had the ultimate sanction of religion. In his words, 'Like the crowds of late sixteenth century France, the rebels in Kanpur had a sense that what they were doing was legitimate; they fought and destroyed in defence of their religion, and their violence had a structure—dramatic and spectacular. What was seen as grotesque was destroyed in a grotesque way, by dehumanising the victims. The violence embedded in British rule was removed through counter-violence: British power had to be destroyed for rebel power to be completely sovereign.'

The initial success of the rebels and the rapidity with which British administration was brought to its knees did not prove sustainable. Over time rebel unity got fractured while the arrival of reinforcements as well as superior tactics enabled the British to recover their ground. From the beginning, the British set themselves to expel the rebels from Delhi and to get troops from Calcutta to recover the rest of north India. From the latter half of 1858, the tide turned in favour of the British as their leaders like Canning and Campbell began to win against the rebels. Campbell had little difficulty in crushing the rebels led by Tantia Tope and clearing the Doab. On 8 June 1857, the British defeated the rebels in Badli-ke-serai and the same day established themselves on the ridge overlooking Delhi. The siege of Delhi was one of the most important episodes in the mutiny of 1857. In September, Delhi was stormed and taken after six days of desperate fighting. The loot that followed and the reprisals the British came up with were savage. The cost to the British and loyal Indian armies in besieging Delhi from the start of the siege to the capture of the city was 1,254 killed, and 4,493 wounded, of which 992 were killed, 2,795

were wounded and 30 missing in action during the final six days of brutal fighting. Hundreds of prisoners were hanged without trial or any judicial process. Similar success was had in the other stations—Allahabad and Lucknow were relieved, as was Kanpur. The Gwalior rebels were defeated in the spring of 1858 and the Rani of Jhansi killed on 17 June. On 20 June the fort of Gwalior passed into British hands and the war of rebellion for practical purposes was over. By July, several taluqdars in Awadh had even been won over and the mutiny officially ended by January 1859. The brutality with which the revolt was suppressed and the untold reign of terror that was unleashed on Delhi left a lasting impression on both sides. The British succeeded because of better reinforcements, lines of communication and ultimately because of superior tactics and coordinated leadership. Equally important was the fact that several areas in India remained passive and took no part in the uprising. This enabled the Company forces to secure reinforcements and help, from the Punjab for example.

The Aftermath

The mutiny marked a major moment in the history of India. It brought to the fore the deep under-swell of resentment against British rule and its consequences and forced the rulers to reconsider their options and strategies. The first development that happened almost immediately was the formal abolition of Company rule and its replacement by Crown rule. On 2 August 1858, the British Parliament passed the Government of India Act, transferring all authority from the East India Company to the British Crown. A Cabinet member, the Secretary of State for India, advised by the Council of India, was given authority for the government of India. In India, supreme authority was vested in the Viceroy, the title assumed by Governor-General Canning. The Viceroy was to be assisted by an Executive Council consisting of twelve members, of whom 6 were to be non-official. This was a small concession to men like Sir Sayyid Ahmed Khan who urged for the selection of Indians for consultation on political matters. Even more conciliatory was Queen Victoria's

proclamation that guaranteed the princes their titles and as well as safeguarding the religion and tradition of the Indian subjects. These steps had very important implications; for one the fact that the Crown assumed sovereignty and responsibility meant that the British were no longer outsiders but were insiders by investing in their monarch the sovereignty of India. The proclamation provided for a new structuring of the relationship between the sovereign and her subjects who fitted into a hierarchy. The princes, the restored aristocracy became the new social bulwarks for the imperial regime even as constitutional concessions were being improvised to enable Indians to take the first steps towards parliamentarism. The new order that came in during the aftermath of the Revolt emphasised a unitary conception of sovereignty—the British Crown being the most important instrument needed to impart a measure of unity to the diversity of India. Perhaps the most important legacy of the mutiny was in the domain of personal relations between ruler and ruled. The manner in which the uprising had shaken the confidence of the rulers and the ferocity with which they responded to rebel violence introduced racial tensions that precluded any possibility of rapprochement. The racial war during the mutiny left an abiding impact and growing antagonism and suspicion. The sepoy who had once been a trusted ally could not longer be trusted and British force could be the only sure basis for British rule. Such a conviction not only distanced the British sovereign from his Indian subject—it introduced profoundly important changes in military organisation and recruitment patterns and gave a fillip to the policy that came to be known as Divide and Rule.

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Epilogue: Culture in the Century of Change

The passing away of the Mughal Empire and its replacement by the Company Bahadur was a long-drawn process with significant consequences for Indian society and polity. The materiality of the Company's presence and operations and their impact on virtually all sections of Indian society was hardly in doubt and in the case of north India, came into striking display during the Mutiny of 1857. How and whether the enormity of the change was registered in the domain of culture and cultural practices is something that surveys of historical change do not fully take into account. This concluding chapter intends to look at the domain of culture and cultural practices in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries and to explore possibilities of studying artistic and cultural change during a period of social dislocation. More specifically, the chapter will look at the visual and performing arts and literary practices, and how these responded to the changing context of patronage and how in the process developed new features that became associated with the idea of the 'modern'. It may be mentioned here that recent scholarship has tended to look at the eighteenth century as a period of the early modern and the nineteenth as the colonial modern—how these categories applied to the domain of art and literary practices as well as political philosophy is an issue that we shall have occasion to briefly comment on.

Let us first attempt a definition of culture in the specific context of what we are studying. The term is being used somewhat narrowly to indicate those artistic and literary practices that

reflected the dominant politico-cultural ethic and orientation of the ruling classes. For the most part, we will be looking at high art practices and not popular ones although to make a strict definition between high/classical and popular in the context of music or visual practices in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries would be somewhat contrived. There were multiple points of intersection between courts and temples/ sufi *silsilah*s and there were also lines of communication and artistic interchange between the courts and the bazaar or kotha while additionally, courts had space for diverse forms of artistic display. What is therefore important to identify is the larger artistic philosophy that permeated certain forms of cultural expression like music, art and narrative production, and see how changing patronage structures and modes of consumption introduced new changes in style, organisation and repertoire. Just as we have the overarching idea of *alankara* that permeated Gupta cultural practices as Daud Ali has argued, in the case of the Mughal and late Mughal cultural preferences, the idea of a balance between pleasure and responsibility, a balance of the humours would appear to have been a powerful guiding principle that was evident in music, medicine and art. Added to this of course was the fact that creative artists, especially in the fields of literature and history grappled with new ideas and the tension of reconciling with change attendant on the decline of the Mughal political structure, which found expression in particular modes of self-reflexivity. In southern India, the eighteenth century was in fact an enormously creative century, especially in the domain of music and performance, which enjoyed a huge stimulus thanks to the creative inputs of several regional courts. In the domain of art, important regional styles of art and architecture emerged and drew their inspiration from both certain classical conventions set by the Mughal Court and from religious influences that continued to be the most important inspirational imperative. Regional variations notwithstanding, we shall look at some broad themes in the cultural history of eighteenth and nineteenth century India, emphasising how the changing context of patronage influenced the styles and reception and even social

Silsilah

An order or chain of transmission associated with Sufi orders.

constituency of the arts. We will look at narrative productions, music and art practices and then tie these up with more recently articulated notions of early and colonial modernity as conceptual categories rather than as strictly chronological ones.

That the eighteenth century was a creative period for the arts was an idea that was put forward by scholars like Herman Goetz in the 1960s. For him, there was something original about eighteenth century culture, especially that which was patronised in the courts and he suggested that art, music and literature could and did achieve distinction in notwithstanding the political convulsions of the period. Other scholars like George Bearce listed the distinctions of individual men—of artists, rulers and even scribes like Ananda Ranga Pillai, the dubash of the French Governor Dupleix—to comment on the vitality of the period and also referred to the important impact that Western learning had on Indian culture. More recently, we have had important contributions from Sanjay Subrahmanyam, V. N. Rao, David Schulman and Muzaffar Alam among others, who have looked at the development of literary culture in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to make a strong case for new genres and modes of historical writing that gestured to a more modern sensibility. We will have occasion to comment on this, and also refer to the nostalgic poetry that the Delhi poets excelled in, and that played such an important role in articulating the sadness of a ruling class who saw their world go by. In the eighteenth century poet Mir's immortal words,

> you would not know this age as you did the one before Mir!
> It is not that age now, nor that earth or sky

Alongside decline and shrinking patronage was the regenerative role played by the advent of colonial power with its training colleges and printing presses, new learning and Christian missionaries that set the stage for new directions of thought and had an important bearing on India's cultural expression. If patronage of one sort receded, then there was the emergence of a new class of consumers and sponsors in regional courts, colonial cities and subsequently reconstituted princely courts, whose intervention was significant in the development of some genres like that of the performing arts.

Narrative Productions in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries

For the most part, poetry was the dominant mode of expression in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, although there were important new modes of historical writing that emerged in southern and eastern India. In the case of Urdu, a new literary and poetic mode emerged—the shahr-e ashob was especially conspicuous as extremely sensitive commentaries on the declining cityscape following the time of troubles. Three major poets associated with this genre were the Delhi poets Mir Dard (1721–1785), Mirza Sauda (1713–1780) and Mir Taqi Mir (1723–1810) who left for Lucknow in search of new patrons, especially after the sack of Delhi by Nadir Shah. All these poets yearned for the old order, parodied the emerging one and saw Delhi as the principal cultural arbiter. The poems were laments about the decay of the city and had antecedents in the Persian lamentations of the Mongol invasions. They were backward looking in their orientation and even quite localised. However, there were others and one may legitimately suggest that these poets were reacting to the changes that they experienced in their lifetime and wrote in more realistic terms than their predecessors. Florid images of cuckoos and lovers were replaced by satires, by rejection of the inversion that society had undergone when the humble ruled the roost and the aristocrat bit the dust. In regions like Bengal and Orissa as well, we come across poetry that reflects the realities of the times. The Oriya poet Brajanath Bodajena wrote of the Maratha ravages of Orissa and his account of the battlefield, full of the cries of the wounded and strewn with the dead, revealed his eye for detail. Bengal's famous poet Bharatchandra (1712–60) composed the famous Annadamangal that became a model for Bengali poets to emulate. The southern regions saw a flowering of historical narratives that stood out in terms of a new texture and orientation. In fact it is around the historical narratives that some of the more recent researches have focused to address more conceptual issues of early modern thought and practice.

The eighteenth century saw the coming of age of scribal culture and the emergence of kayasths and karanams in north and south India respectively. Beginning from the seventeenth century, scribal

groups were instrumental in the fashioning of an information order and an indigenous public sphere. According to C. A. Bayly, the practices of Indo-Muslim writing were located in this ecumene and demonstrated modern concerns quite unmediated by the colonial factor. In the south the literati known as the karanam produced new works in a variety of languages—Sanskrit, Persian, Telugu—and adopted a different template to produce a vernacular form of history where causality, sequence and self-consciousness of credible sources became distinguishing markers. *Niti* texts belonged to the same category of a new rationality that accompanied post-Vijayanagara state formations with their new constituencies. In Maharashtra too, a new kind of historical consciousness was evident in the emerging genre of the *bakhars*; these were historical, factual and relied on a secular-causal model, stressing political rationality and thereby indexing a new early modern temperament. This tendency was not universal—Partha Chatterjee argues that the Annadamangal in Bengal told a very different history and that in Bengal, it was really the colonial project that produced a new mode of consciousness and historical writing. Here vernacular histories were more like genealogies and did not follow the authorised conventions of academic history.

Niti Texts

Texts that referred to political ethics

Two things are interesting about the literary narratives of the century of change (1707–1857). One is the ways in which older political and cultural centres generated diverse narratives ranging from histories such as the Bobbiliyuddhakatha, Tanjavuri Andhra Rajalu Caritra and the Subadar of the Cot texts that Schulman, Subrahmnyam and Rao have worked on and or the *Haidarnama* written in 1784 and which marked a shift to anticipate some of the later secular concerns. Equally important, although part of a different genre, were Persian histories that sought to explain the reasons for the decline of the Mughal Empire using the framework of moral and ethical governance. Secondly, there were in this period of transition, new possibilities generated by colonial institutions and the network of printing activity that accompanied colonial administrative and missionary initiatives. The Serampore mission in Bengal was an extremely important catalyst for printing and publishing activities and in sponsoring a modern literary tradition.

In Tanjore for example, we have the instance of missionary influence on rulers like Serfoji II and Vedanayakam Sastri whose works on poetry and prose were inspired by his encounter with Christianity and whose orientation was decidedly modern. The Fort William and Fort George Colleges who worked with pundits, gave a fillip to new literary practices like the production of dictionaries and language standardisation that was to become important for modern literary culture. Both these colleges were also associated with orientalism—which in a broad sense can be seen as part of official interest in Indian antiquity, scholarship and languages and which was disseminated through a team of pandit-collaborators. However, following Edward Said's seminal work on orientalism, this term has come to acquire a new and more inflected set of meanings associated with the articulation of colonial/imperial power that sought for its own requirements to describe the Orient in stark contrast to the Occident and in a series of binary oppositions. Such a system of representation produced a particular ordering of society that continued to be endlessly reproduced and even adopted by the subjects.

It may legitimately be suggested that the articulation of a new orientation in literary and historical narratives reflected important changes in political ideology as well. As the work of Muzaffar Alam shows, rulers and theologians in Muslim India and particularly in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries adapted Islam and its interpretation to the exigencies of rule. Caught between religion and rule, rulers and notables fostered a culture that was composite and assumed a decidedly new orientation. Thus, Islam opened itself to non-Islamic influences, incorporated local practices, questioned its original ideals, and in the process came up with a language of pragmatism and rule.

The same degree of openness and experimentation would appear to have permeated artistic sensibilities. In tracking the changes in visual and musical cultural practices, the most important factor to be borne in mind is that of patronage and changes in its structure.

In understanding the development of the arts in India in the period under review, one must then keep in mind the sharp contraction in one form of patronage and the development of new

agencies of the same. This was especially evident in the case of the arts—visual and performing—where important developments facilitated the development of what one may call the 'modern' turn leading, at least in the case of music, to a particular form of classicism. The Mughal court had been a huge patron of the arts and its decline was viewed as a catastrophe by artists who flocked to new regional centres in search of new patrons. Between 1740 and 1857, the courts of Jaipur, Awadh, Hyderabad, and to a lesser extent Banaras, Murshidabad and Hyderabad became important regional centres supporting the tradition even as it accommodated important changes in its repertoire and style. In fact the eighteenth century was an extremely innovative period for Indian music—both North Indian and Karnatic traditions. All the major forms that we now associate with North Indian classical music, Khayal, Thumri and the instrumental music of the sitar and sarode in the context of a new urban dispensation—their structure, content and chief aesthetic concerns were articulated with a particular precision between 1757 and 1857. Moreover, it was during this period that important networks of patronage emerged by which classical music spread before and after the Mutiny and survived the pressures of transition. These regional centres of patronage were to become, in turn, conduits for the passage of traditional music into the world of modern urbanised India. This was true of the south as well—the eighteenth century saw the Maratha court at Tanjore emerge as a major cultural centre, where the court's interest in standardisation was matched by the individual genius of composers.

Music—Changing Patronage and Changing Forms

For the greater part of the 18th and early 19th centuries, despite the devastations that tore north Indian society apart, the musical culture of northern India continued to move within a interlocking grid of courtly patronage, networks of Hindu devotional and Sufi mystical practices, and popular spaces of secular and religious entertainment. The imperial city of Delhi occupied the centre of this grid and set

standards in the arts and other cultural practices, although after the gruesome events of the second half of the eighteenth century its 'centrality' became largely symbolic. The tragedy of Mughal political decline stood in contrast to manifestations of creative energy at least in the domain of music and culture, even if contemporaries preferred to see patronage and promotion of music as an expression of moral decay and political decline. In place of the state, the noble havelis and mansions of leading merchants became mini courts and centres of cultural patronage, especially of music and the *sama* associated with Sufi circles in the city. Artistically the period is associated with the growing eminence of Sadarang Neamat Khan who enjoyed the patronage of Emperor Muhammad Shah. Sadarang is credited with the introduction of the Khayal genre that attained increasing popularity through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. He is also supposed to have improvised with instruments, the *been* in particular, while his nephew Feroz Khan, better known as Adarang, is supposed to have mastered the sitar. Both the sitar and the been appear to have evolved from around this time, growing longer and larger, with wider frets and acquiring more strings. These changes occurred largely in the context of a transformed social setting for music in the aftermath of Mughal decline. The changes that Sadarang and his circle initiated were accelerated in the subsequent decades as music spilt over after 1740 into a number of regional centres and courts.

Around the last quarter of the eighteenth century, musicians moved out of Delhi in large numbers to regional centres in pursuit of employment and patronage. By the 1780s there was before them a choice of three or four regional courts where music and performance was valued. Notable among these was Lucknow. Jaipur was another favourite destination with which the composer 'Manarang', (presumed to be a relative of Sadarang) famous for his khayals and *dadras* in the *dhrupad* manner is associated in this period. The founder of the kingdom, Sawai Jai Singh, (1727–1743) was favourably disposed to music and its scholarship, and under his successors the court supported an impressive number of instrumentalists. For vocal music, the Maratha city of Gwalior emerged as an outstanding centre with its ruler Daulat Rao Sindhia (1794–1827) bringing to his court the vocalist Kadir Baksh and

his sons Haddu and Hassu Khan. Under his successor Jayaji Rao Sindhia (who succeeded Jankoji Rao Sindhia after 1843), the policy of extending patronage to musicians was continued with the result that Gwalior developed into a thriving musical centre. Smaller regional courts such as Banaras, Betiah, Rewa, Darbhanga and Banda also held out important opportunities for musicians on the move—an indication of the importance music and its patronage held for the cultural politics and profile of indigenous kingdoms. It may well be argued that in a period of great instability and shrinking political opportunity, indigenous states with hollow crowns had little else to fall back upon. The pleasures of listening to musical performance that combined both aesthetic enjoyment as well as religious identification were compounded with considerations of ritual status and honour, all of which musical practice and patronage ensured. In such a charged atmosphere it would be easier to make sense of the Awadh sovereign Wajid Ali Shah's obsessive engagement with music and poetry. What stands out in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries is an extraordinary degree of creativity and change even as musicians had to find new patrons and moved between regional courts to keep their occupations and practices alive. The intense competition for patronage was also instrumental in the formation of specific region-based *gharana*, which seems to have been a nineteenth century development. Most of these lineages traced their origins, mythical or otherwise to the *senia* tradition that was seen as the ultimate stamp of legitimacy.

Senia Tradition

Tradition that invoked the name of Tansen the celebrated musician of Akbar's court

The aftermath of the Mutiny inaugurated a new set of developments in the field of north Indian music. It marked the moment of rupture with a pre-modern past and the inauguration of the forces of modernisation, even if the British crown preferred to maintain a low profile in matters of religious and social reform. While the moment of reckoning had already occurred in regions like Bengal, which by 1857 had embraced and responded to the benefits and challenges of Western education, the Mutiny made this transition unequivocal for the rest of the country. For music, the rupture with an earlier political and moral economy was not

insignificant. While in terms of style, content and orientation, the essential features of north Indian classical music had already been accumulated and expanded in the century of decline and transition, the changing context of patronage especially as music came under the purview of a modernising elite in cities and courts alike, exercised a profound impact on the social constituency of the tradition. As music dispersed and musicians spread outside their immediate location, they found it critical to invoke originary claims of authenticity for their music and the family they represented. A tangible manifestation of this process was in the emergence of gharanas or styles, all of which were intertwined with older webs of sociability based on Qawwal Bachhe teaching lines and *kalawant* families. At the same time, the increasing interest of the middle class in music was producing a new sociology of performance and pedagogy. Muslim *ustad*s, hereafter, had to negotiate with an 'orientalised' nationalism that privileged the Hindu past and modern notions of institutional music education.

In the south, developments in the domain of the performing arts, especially music, were spearheaded largely by the Maratha Court at Tanjore. A line of eclectic Maratha rulers promoted music and sponsored important developments in musicology and standardisation. The court became synonymous with cultural excellence—a line of significant musicians and performers in court improvised new genres of compositions. The late eighteenth century was also the period of the Tanjore trinity—the three great composers of Carnatic music, Tyagaraja, Diksitar and Syama Sastri, who experimented with the Kriti form to establish a firm foundation for modern Carnatic music. The trinity was not part of the court circuit, although there were important connections between the various layers of performance. What stand out in the period under review is three things. One, the nature of the court's cultural engagement that was part of an older concern with music as a cultural resource, but at the same time gestured to a new sensibility that explored possibilities of standardisation and systematic transmission. Serfoji II (1798–1832) was a renaissance man and was inspired by his association with the missionary Schwartz and set up the Saraswathi Mahal library, an astronomy centre and a museum. Indira Peterson has argued that he

created a cabinet of science and art on the model of the European Kunstkammer, and that his cabinet bore the stamp of a particular configuration of ideas and practices relating to European science in the eighteenth century, transmitted to him through his education under German Pietist missionaries from Halle. Secondly, there was in this period an outburst of creative energy embodied in the compositions of the trinity whose approach to musical activity was extremely individuated. There was an attempt to translate the kriti into a vehicle of spontaneous self-expression and which heralded a veritable transformation of the musical field. More than that the composers especially Tyagaraja was able to develop a lineage of disciples with a rudimentary commitment to notation and authorship that helped in the transmission of the tradition on scientific lines. Thirdly, with the development of Madras city and the migration of service castes into the city, there was a parallel influx of musicians and singers and performers. Madras thus replaced Tanjore as the cultural capital and over time especially in the second half of the nineteenth century, its Brahmin elites emerged as major listeners and custodians of the musical tradition that they reinvented, classicised and systematised.

In terms of performance, both northern and southern India had a robust tradition ranging from temple dances to rural theatre to the nautch of the courtesan. These genres became more clearly marked off as non classical in course of the nineteenth century, when middle class elites undertook the task of reinventing a classical tradition that could not quite reconcile to the performance repertoire and social constituency of the art forms. The tradition of the devadasis especially prevalent in southern India came under steady pressure in this period partly on account of the decline of indigenous state systems that had supported the community through rent free grants and partly on account of the growing ambiguity of their status under Anglo-Indian law. Even though British jurists were reluctant to interfere in their legal rights and entitlements, their descriptions of devadasis as participants in a different sexual economy, made them vulnerable and a target of subsequent social reform and engineering. This had serious implications for the musical tradition as devadasis had specialised in a very specific repertoire of compositions.

Visual Arts in Transition

Any understanding of the visual arts in the century of transition can also be studied only in relation to changing networks of patronage and to the new political preeminence of the English East India Company. The Mughal court under Muhammad Shah had several renowned painters under its aegis and it would seem that the traditional Mughal style continued to persist even if later paintings showed reduced numbers of figures. Over time, the fortunes of painter-craftsmen declined even though some of them survived by seeking a new patron, by migrating to new princely courts and by even selling debased bazaar paintings. Eastern India, where the British gained a foothold very early on in the century was a special case where not only did Mughal artists receive new sources of patronage but also encountered new artistic challenges. Landscape became important as did portraiture and more importantly, Company painters as they were known received instruction in European drawing. Painters from Patna and Murshidabad flocked to Calcutta in search of work and turned out water colours in the English mode. The Company also adopted painters for documentation and ethnographic purposes. Three important names that we encounter are Zayn-al-Din, Bhawani Das and Ram Das who came from Patna and who produced albums of Indian birds and animals in large sheets of European made paper in opaque water colour in the last quarter of the century. Similarly, two painters of Delhi, Ghulam Ali Khan and Lallji were commissioned by the Fraser brothers in about 1815 to paint water colours of the inhabitants of Delhi. A third group of accomplished painters worked in Lahore for French Generals in the employment of Maharaja Ranjit Singh in the second quarter of the nineteenth century. The arrival and presence of European artists in regional courts like those of Awadh was an important stimulus to artistic activity in this period.

By the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth century, however, an important institutional change occurred when the East India Company announced the setting up of art schools to confer the benefits of 'moral and material knowledge' on Indian subjects. The first western art school was founded by the British resident Sir Charles Malet in Pune in 1798 to enable local painters to assist visiting British artists. The first proper art school was the Calcutta Mechanics Institution and School of Arts, founded by Frederick Corbyn after a public meeting on February 1830. The school was expected to wean Indian artists from their slovenly habits and to open the doors to scientific knowledge. Arts schools were opened in Bombay and Madras as well and the overall agenda of these new schools seems to have been to emphasise development of skilled designers and thereby adopt a more realistic approach to their art. This important input had serious implications and became the basis around which ideas on Indian modernism and tradition were articulated subsequently in the century. These developments associated with the emergence of modernism in Indian art was admittedly a mid and late nineteenth century development but it would not be far fetched to suggest that the century of transition presaged important cultural formations and that the artists were in dialogue with new influences and brought their creative energy to the emerging project. In the case of music, the influence of western traditions was minimal even if at the level of discourse, the preoccupation with textuality and authorship, authenticity and pedagogy was singularly evident.

One could actually argue that on the whole, the arts scene in India for the greater part of the eighteenth and nineteenth century was the lively expression of a society that was, as George Bearce says, still master of its destiny. In his words, 'Wars and invasions could be disruptive, famines were injurious, and the social conditions limited the capacity of many Indians for cultural expression. The society, nevertheless, at its various levels, aristocratic and popular, produced in both variety and quality an impressive amount of art, music, literature, and learning.' The articulation of an explicitly Angliscist policy and the confidence of imperial power changed the equation as Indian society and its leaders grappled uneasily with the obvious appeal of Westernisation and balanced it with an exaggerated sense of defending Indian tradition. Hence the preoccupation with the reinvention of a proper tradition that was also in part derived from the nature of collaboration that the colonial rulers set up with their high caste informers and collaborators. Colonial knowledge played no mean role in this formation: cultural forms

in societies newly classified as 'traditional' were reconstructed and transformed by this knowledge, which created new categories and oppositions between colonisers and colonised, European and Asian, modern and traditional, West and East. According to Nicholas Dirks, through the delineation and reconstitution of systematic grammars for vernacular languages, the control of Indian territory through cartographic technologies and picturesque techniques of rule, the representation of India through the mastery and display of archaeological mementos and ritual texts, the taxing of India through the reclassification and assessment of land use, property form, and agrarian structure, and the enumeration of India through the statistical technology of the census, Britain set in motion transformations every bit as powerful as the better-known consequences of military and economic imperialism. The articulation of caste was also part of the same process.

The impact of colonial education was profound as it was perhaps the most important vehicle of epistemic change. However some recent research suggests that indigenous knowledge systems came under the influence of complex developments, not all connected with the colonial state. The inputs of eighteenth century regional courts and elites were not insignificant. In the case of Unani medicine for example, Seema Alavi argues that the Unani system which had emerged out of a mélange of Greek, Ayurveda and Persian ideas enjoyed unprecedented patronage in the Mughal court where the idea of medical knowledge and healing as an integral part of aristocratic etiquette fed into the existing notions of good governance and kingly virtue. Medicine as a form of healing was central to the building of an imperial political culture, which had far reaching social implications quite outside the boundaries of the State. From here the argument is made that the decline of the Mughal State did not necessarily correspond to a decline of the Unani system—instead a more complex process of change generated internal differences within Unani and that ultimately proved more crucial than the colonial intervention in Unani's tryst with modernity. The whole process of transformation was triggered off by a democratisation of Persian etiquette medical literature in the eighteenth century that in turn

encouraged small elite families to close their ranks and preserve their knowledge by adopting Arabic, which had in any case been the medium of a parallel medical discourse that perceived healing in scientistic terms. The adoption of Arabic came with a price—it forced an arbitrary correspondence between Unani and Islam and cut into the older inclusive constituency of Unani. This tendency was reinforced by the early educational policies of the English East India Company that in its wisdom introduced yet another factor namely the diffusion of medical knowledge through Urdu by the native doctors they appointed under the Native Medical Institution. What these changes involved was the introduction of several communities of medical literature that on the one hand threatened the status and influence of old and respected hakim families, and on the other democratised the learning besides exposing it to a variety of influences. Evidently in all this the great leveler was print and the vernacularisation of medical knowledge that happened to coincide with the program of the colonial state but developed a momentum that the latter could not contain or control. However, it is important not to underestimate the impact of colonial education on virtually all aspects of society in urban India. It was through education that Indians began to absorb new ideas and forms of debate and associational activity and in the process rethink ideas of traditional knowledge systems, not to speak of religion. Thus Rammohan Roy was a pioneer of journalism and also published Vedanta texts and commentaries, influenced by Islamic rationalism and Christian monotheism. Even the more conservative bodies like sponsors of the Dharma Sabha or the landholders Association began to think of new forms of protest and representation that went beyond the narrow confines of caste. All these societies were definitely influenced by European public and civic bodies and marked the beginning of 'modern' politics and publics in India.

No survey of the cultural and social developments in the eighteenth century will be complete without reference to religion and the religious ferment that the early colonial encounter produced. We have had occasion to refer to thinkers like Raja Rammohan Roy who engaged with Islam and Christianity to found an acceptable religion that satisfied his rational self as well as his pursuit of an omniscient

being. The spirit of critical enquiry that surfaced during the anti-sati campaigns as well as the popularity of saint figures in various parts of India testified to the profound anxieties that the colonial encounter generated. On the other hand, it would not do to exaggerate this for there were large parts of the subcontinent where local practices prevailed and an older moral and cultural economy continued to operate quite autonomously. At the same time, it is important to keep in mind that the colonial factor was not the only determinant of change—signs of a new temperament, sensibility and consciousness were clearly evident and were expressed in a diversity of modes. As early as the 1960's, Bearce referred to the vitality of contemporary political thought and the various cultural projects undertaken by regional courts and made the point that contrary to Macaulay's belief that India was without historical writing, hundreds of works of history were written at the princely courts and intellectual centers during the century and that from reading these histories one gains considerable insight into the moral outlook and political viewpoint of Indians in the eighteenth century. That these views were thwarted even deflected by the rapidity of conquest and transformation was what characterised one strand in the cultural history of the period. The other was a creative tension between what constituted the appropriate balance between traditional dharma and modern justice. The tension and anxiety did not in any way reduce the completeness of the revolution—surely this was a place and an age that was not as Mir had remarked, the same any more.

How do we then in retrospect look at the first century of colonial rule? The question is of some significance as we have had heated debates about the limits of colonial rule, of its partial and incomplete impact on Indian society. Historians subscribing to this view have tended to either see the indigenous origins of the colonial state like Bayly, or to insist on the importance of indigenous developments that far outweighed the colonial factor (Marshall, Alavi) and identify those areas where local factors undermined the extent of the colonial intervention (Frykenburg). There is also the question of periodisation of Indian history, of the dating of colonialism in the Indian context and of its pernicious consequences for the Indian economy. Evidently these questions have been at the heart

of severely polemical positions but the important thing for students of history is to take note of the complexity of developments, of their representation and to understand the contradictions inherent in a colonial situation and in the Company's project. It is true that the colonial Indian state's modernity was largely fractured and incomplete—the extent of intervention even before the mutiny was only partial. Nevertheless, the modern colonial state had imposed an unifying apparatus of codes and regulations had penetrated through society more comprehensively than its predecessors. Its revenue systems had definitely altered the configurations of rural society. Thus, notwithstanding regional variations, the overall impression of a major social transformation was evident as India moved under the control of the British Crown in 1858.

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Glossary

AGENCY HOUSES: Agency houses were an important commercial formation in the late eighteenth and nineteenth century in India. British merchants and free traders organised themselves into agency houses, attracted deposits from Company servants and retired personnel and invested the same in a variety of commercial operations. Among the more important ones, were the houses of Palmer and Company, Bruce Fawcett and Company.

ALANKARA: Adornment or embellishment.

AMIL: Revenue collectors

AMLA: Clerk, tax gatherer

AURANG: A collecting centre for textiles. The Company organised several such collection centres where weavers were assembled and ordered to produce cloth according to specifications.

BANIAN: Banian was the name given to an Indian agent of the English East India Company, who was in charge of information gathering, of securing capital for investment and of marketing. He received a commission for the same. Banian is not the same as bania, a term indicating a particular caste generally engaged in a range of trade and money related functions.

BAKHAR: Generally understood to mean Historical writing or narrative derived from the Persian word Khair or bakhair although this view has been contested by some scholars.

CASTLE REVOLUTION: In 1759, the English East India Company attacked Surat Castle and assumed the right to administer the city jointly with the Nawab. The Castle Revolution gave the Company important political benefits.

CHAUTH: Chauth was a tax or tribute imposed, from the early eighteenth century, by the Marathas. It was nominally levied at 25% on revenue or produce, whence the name. The *sardeshmukhi* was an additional 10% levy on top of the *chauth*.

CUTCHERRY: Court

DAFTAR-I-DIWANI: Office of revenue adminsitration

DAFTAR-I-MAL: Office or department responsible for finances and revenues

DASTAK: Dastak was a trade permit that exempted European traders from paying customs duties on their private trade.

DAROGA: Head of police, customs or excise station

DESAI: Property holder or holders of revenue rights

DESHMUKH: Holder of revenue entitlements

EVANGELICAL: A protestant missionary sect especially interested in social reform.

FARMAN: Imperial decree

FAUJDARI: Military officer

FAUJDARI ADALAT: police court

GHARANA: Musical lineage or family

GENTOO: Hindu

GOMASTA: An Indian agent of the East India Company.

GOSAIN: Dasnami sannyasi title.

INAM LANDS: Gifts of land or land revenue. These fell under different categories.

KANOON: Law

LATHIYAL: Petty armed officers assisting zamindars as well as darogas

MASAND: Local Sikh officials in charge of designated sangats or congregations

MIRASIDAR: Co-parcenary title holder and designated revenue payer. The term was familiar in southern India. This landowner had the power to command retainers who tilled his soil and received their subsistence from him.

MISL: The 12 states of the Sikh confederacy were known as misls. While they competed amongst themselves for power and territory, they acted in unison in relation to other states.

MONOPSONY: Monopsony is a form of market with many sellers, but only one buyer, who is in a position to dictate terms to the sellers.

NAIB NAZIM: Deputy officers

NIZAMAT: Office of general administration and criminal justice

NAIB SUBA: An officer appointed by the Nawab of Bengal who presided over the criminal jurisdiction. He sat as judge in important cases.

NAIB DIWAN AND NIAB NAZIM: Deputy officers in charge of revenue and civil administration

NITI TEXTS: Texts that referred to political ethics

ORIENTAL DESPOTISM: Oriental despotism was a term used to describe a form of government characterised by despotism and tribute-collection, believed to be opposed to the rational Western forms of government.

PATIL: Headman, village chief, revenue intermediary

PATTA: Patta title deed or legal evidence of a person's right to property

POTEDAR: Small shroff often called poddar

QASBA: Locality

QILADAR: Officer in charge of the Castle in Surat. This Mughal officer shared the responsibility of the city administration with the Mutasaddi or governor.

RAIYAT/RYOT: Peasant

SARKAR, PARGANA: Mughal administrative divisions; the Mughal Empire was divided into Subas – subas into sarkars and sarkars into parganas.

SADAR DIWANI ADALAT: High Court of civil and revenue jurisdiction

SADAR NIZAMAT ADALAT: High Court for criminal jurisdiction

SENIA TRADITION: Tradition that invoked the name of Tansen the celebrated musician of Akbar's court

SHROFF: Derived from the word Sarraff meaning banker. Typically his functions were money changing, money assaying and issuing and discounting of hundis or bills of exchange.

SILSILAH: An order or chain of transmission associated with Sufi orders.

SINGHS: Literally, lion. The name appended to all male Sikh initiates

SUBA: Mughal administrative division

SUBAHDAR: Official in charge of the suba—later to mean provincial governor

SWARAJYA: Literally home land, this had a specific connotation under the Maratha ruler Shivaji Bhonsle who carved out a specific territory for himself and his followers.

UPARI: Upari was a category of tenancy tenure held under the Maratha regime.

UTILITARIANS: Utilitarians were advocates of the idea 'the greatest good for the greatest number of people'. The most celebrated spokesmen of the idea were Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill.

WIZARAT: Office of the prime minister and under the Mughals, in charge of the important task of assigning jagirs to Mughal nobles.

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Lakshmi Subramanian is Professor of History in the Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Kolkata. She has previously taught at Jamia Millia Islamia (New Delhi), University of Calcutta and Visva-Bharati (Santiniketan).

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